A Modern Evil

by

Evie Sartor Byrd

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ELOISE.

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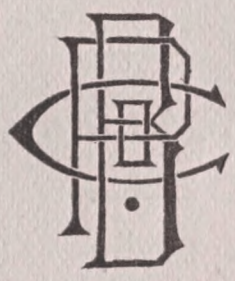

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EVIE SARTOR BYRD

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To my good friend,
JOHN RUSH NEWMAN,
of Straw Plains, Tennessee, this book is
most respectfully dedicated.

A MODERN EVIL.

CHAPTER I.

A MODERN EVIL.

In one of our Southern cities the town clock was striking the hour of nine. With the last stroke a young man came out of an office in an uptown building which bore the sign: "Van Worth & Nevarro." Locking the door behind him he paused for a moment under a flaring street lamp, and striking a match succeeded after some difficulty in lighting his cigar. Then pulling his hat lower over his eyes, walked hurriedly down street. A weary, chilly rain was falling, freezing as it fell, and the streets usually so crowded at such times (it was Saturday night and the twenty-third of December) were almost deserted. The young man shivered and turned up the collar of his great coat. He heard the dull monotonous hum of a street car as it turned the corner of the street and came like a flash down the track behind him singing as it went. He wished that he were able to ride to his own door. It passed with a speed like lightning, and Earle Nevarro, the junior partner of the

firm for which he worked as assistant book-keeper, was hanging on behind. He recognized the young man and threw up his hand in recognition. Jack Venarez crossed the car track, and a few moments later ran up the steps of his home. A pretty girl of fourteen rose to greet him as he came into the small, cozy sitting-room. She had been singing her baby brother to sleep. She rose as her brother came forward, and stood holding his hands before the fire.

"It's a bitter cold night, old girl," he said, drawing his shoulders together, in an involuntary shudder. "It's freezing outside."

"Yes, Jack," the girl replies, as she stirs the fire briskly until it throws out a ruddy glow. "Sit down and get warm, and then you shall have supper. You can go to the dining-room, or I will bring it in to the fire."

"Thanks, I'll go to the table."

Bending over the crib he said:

"The little man's asleep, is he? I have something for him, and for you, too."

"Oh, have you? You're the best brother in the world, Jack. What did you get Hugh?"

"Help me off with my coat," her brother said, tugging away at the article in question, "and then you can see."

There was a toy locomotive with cars, a drum and a horn, and several other little things which were intended to fill baby Hugh's small soul with delight; besides a goodly supply of fruits and candy. Eloise was delighted. She pictured to herself how happy baby would be on the morrow. Jack had bought for her a writing desk, a

pearl pen-holder and a book of poems, which immediately claimed her attention. She was an inveterate book-worm, and Jack, like many other young men in a similar dilemma, had decided upon the book for a holiday gift, not knowing what else to buy. He could not have pleased his sister better had he tried ever so much; and after glancing it through hurriedly, with a smile of satisfaction she laid it aside, and, lighting a small lamp, led the way to the dining-room. Jack followed, and, drawing a chair up to the table, sat down. He was a handsome boy of eighteen, tall, broad-shouldered, slightly inclined to stoutness, with a large, well-shaped head, closely covered with a growth of light curly hair. His dark blue eyes, firm well-set jaw, and a good-natured, well-formed mouth, made his appearance very pleasing. His half sister was very pretty. Her sombre black dress enhanced her ivory-white complexion, and showed off her slender graceful figure to perfection. Her eyes were an expressive gray, her lips were full and red. She had little color, but her face was wondrously fair and delicately rounded, while her thick, long hair was a glossy brown. It was combed straight back from the high white forehead and tied with a bow of black ribbon. They were not at all alike. Jack had been working only for a few months. Up to that time he had attended school regularly, and possessed a fair education. But his father had died six months before this story opens, and Jack had been obliged to leave school and to take his father's place in the office. His mother had died when he was only two years old. They lived

in Texas then, and Jack's grandparents were still there. His grandfather owned much real estate and an extensive cattle farm. His mother was an only child, and when she died and Mr. Venarez came South, Jack was left with his grandparents, who begged that they might keep him. Two years later, however, his father married the second time and sent for little Jack. When Jack was about five years old Eloise was born; and then twelve years later little Hugh. Mrs. Venarez, the second, lived only six months after Hugh was born, and then died, as all her family had, of consumption, leaving the duties of housekeeping and the care of little Hugh to poor Eloise. But she did her duty nobly and well, though her father's unexpected death had forever blotted out the hope she cherished of completing her education. True, there was Mrs. Maxcy, a good soul with no one but herself, whom her mother had often employed, and who always discharged her duties faithfully; but she could not leave Hugh to her keeping altogether. Therefore she resigned herself to the inevitable, although it cost her a bitter pang. Her friends were few. She never went anywhere except occasionally to church, and now and then to her father's and mother's grave. They lived in the poorer part of the city, and some of Eloise's neighbors were not as desirable as she would have liked. During her father's lifetime they had lived in a better part of the town, for his salary was better than Jack's—a fact at which that young fellow often marvelled—for if he could fill his father's place, and do the work just

as well, why, he reasoned, did he not receive the same compensation. The ways of employers are froward and strange, and so our friends had to live within their income, and very reluctantly left their old home with its bitter-sweet associations, and moved further down town. Eloise shed a few regretful tears at first. It was hard to leave the place where her dear father and mother had died; but as the days went on she grew to love her new home, and she had Jack and little Hugh to live for still. Contrary to the girl's expectations, but few of the friends of her former life ever visited her in her new position; she seemed to have passed out of their lives and memory altogether. Poor child! She had yet to learn how cruel this old world can be to those who have gone down in the strife. Of her former associates but one came to see her almost daily as of old. Ada Dalton was an orphan. She lived with her aunt, Miss Hilton, a maiden lady who had reared her. She was a pretty brunette, a year older than Eloise. They had been friends for several years, and during all Eloise's sorrow she had been her chief consoler. She it was who came every day or so and brightened by her lively play of wit the girl's saddened lot. She attended every juvenile social function and entertained Eloise with bright accounts of them. The latter had never attended any such things—the little diversions that go to make a girl's life happy—and she enjoyed to the utmost hearing Ada's accounts of the "good times" which she always had. She longed to live such a life as this as only a pretty girl hampered by

circumstances, and who sees it all from the outside can long. Jack rose from the table.

"I was paid off to-night," he said, and reaching for his purse he turned to his sister and emptied its contents into her hand.

"Put that away and keep it. There's no telling what we might need, you know. I see Earle Nevarro it home for the holidays. I should like to be in his place; he ought to be happy—he has everything. I suppose Serrell Levare is home also. They are attending the citadel together."

The girl's thoughts instantly reverted to the dark, quite-looking young fellow who had so often seen her on her way to and from school; who always lifted his hat courteously, and who once, when she had fallen and sprained her ankle, had had her carried home in his uncle's (Mr. Van Worth's) handsomely appointed carriage, which happened to be passing; and always after that when he spoke to her he smiled slightly in recognition; and Eloise fancied he always seemed just a wee bit glad to see her. It had been a long, long time since she had seen him. His parents were dead, and his uncle, who had brought him up, was educating him. When they were again in the sitting-room, Jack said:

"Mr. Van Worth has promised to raise my salary after Christmas. He says he couldn't get anyone else to do the work for the money I receive, and he is going to give me a lift. By Jove! That's a pretty little girl he's got. Ever see her? Well, she's a stunner, sure! Pretty as red shoes, and cheeky isn't a name for it! I was never introduced to her in my life, but she always has

something to say to me when she's around. Comes down to the store every day," lighting his cigar and throwing his head back. "Drives her own turnout and dresses out o' sight. Whew! I'd like to see you rigged up like her once, Eloise. Guess she and Nevarro will marry when she grows up. Keep the money together, you know. Rich folks have a knack of doing that sort of thing. Before I forget, I guess I'd better ask you for a little of that change that I gave you. I gave you all I had, and I'll need a little along. It takes money to smoke, you know, and that must go on though the heavens fall."

CHAPTER II.

OUR HEROINE FINDS A NEW FRIEND.

"No one can be happy without a friend, and no one can know what friends he has until he is unhappy. Oh! the comfort, the inexpressible comfort, of feeling safe with a person—having neither to weigh the thoughts nor measure the words, but pouring them right out, just as they are, chaff and grain together, certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then with the breath of kindness, blow the rest away."

—*Selected.*

Christmas had passed and February thaws had left the streets and roads wet and sloppy. There was a monotonous dripping from the eaves, and little pools of water stood all about. Eloise had taken a severe cold, which compelled her to remain indoors. It was bad enough before, when she could be out in the open air, she reasoned bitterly. Jack had brought her several new books at noon, and she had tried to read them, but her head ached, and little Hugh fretted incessantly. She was looking out at the passing vehicles, when some one ran up the steps and

crossed the piazza, then, opening the door, paused in the hall.

"May I come in?" a cheery voice called, and Ada Dalton, enveloped in her rain coat, came smiling into the room.

"I'm awfully glad to see you, Ada," Eloise says, and drawing a chair near the fire for her, "Aren't you cold?"

The girl shook her head.

"No; if I took cold every time I stepped out this sort of weather I'd freeze. Aunt Emma scolds me for running about so much, but really, I can't stay indoors, Eloise! It stifles me. Jack told me you were complaining, and I decided to run over and tell you the news. You should have been at the dance last night, Eloise," she continued, her eyes sparkling. "The music was exquisite! The boys sent to Charleston for it. The hall was crowded; some of the most exquisite costumes! I'm so glad that this place is no larger than it is; for you know in larger cities girls of my age do not go into society at all. Zida Van Worth was there, and the boys were wild about her. Not so much for herself, I think, as for the fortune which they imagine she will one day inherit. Her moonstones are lovely. They are her hobby, she says, and her father gave her a full set Christmas. Lillian Nevarro was there, too. She is a peculiar looking girl—so quiet, so different from Zida. Most people are of the opinion that she tries to be very exclusive; but I don't know. Some imagine that Earle is the same way, but that's a mistake. I know Earle well," smilingly, "and he's just as cordial as he

can be. He and Serrell are at school now. We had a gay time when they were here Christmas, but I believe I told you about that? I met a young man last night, Eloise, and I wish you could see him. He is as handsome as a Greek, and audacious? Well I should say! I promised to let him call upon me, though I know Earle will be jealous," blushing. "But, then, he needn't know it. Don't say anything to Jack about what I tell you, Eloise. I'll tell you anything, you know. I do wish to goodness you'd hurry and come out of that dreadful black and go around, too. We'd have such glorious times together. How long do you mean to wear it?"

"I hardly know," Eloise says slowly.

There was a moment's silence. Ada's eyes were fixed on the dying embers, from whence came a musical singing sound. A car hummed past. "I wonder how far in the future our pathways will sever?" she asks suddenly, and Eloise detected touching sadness in her words. "Eloise, you know I have never known a mother's love," she went on. "I have never had anyone to tell me what I imagine most mothers tell their growing daughters, for though Aunt Emma is very kind, she is so peculiar, you know. That was one reason I loved your mother so. She did not hesitate to give me advice on all subjects. They say that everything happens for the best, and I try to think so; yet I cannot but question why my mother was taken from me. But I must not make you sad, dear; so let's change the subject. Have you seen Earle Nevarro since he's been wearing a uniform?" she begins suddenly. "You

should, Eloise. It sets him off splendidly. All the girls are wild about him, and you'd be, too, if you could only see him. You know that Tillman says that brass buttons are great girl fascinators; and he is right, as he invariably is. Serrell Levare is so different from Earle. He's so grave—so quiet; not unlike Lillian Nevarro. You and Serrell would go nicely together. You don't talk much either; so you could just sit together and hold solemn silence. Don't get angry with me, Eloise. You know I always would tease you."

"Yes," Eloise replied smiling, "go ahead. I don't mind. I'm used to it, you see."

They talked on until nearly dark. Then Ada rose, saying she must go.

"Come around, Eloise, and bring the baby," she called back as she fastened the gate. Eloise stood in the doorway watching her off. A magnificent coupe dashed by, and she recognized Mrs. Van Worth and Zida. Twilight was falling. The girl sighed, and went slowly back into the room. Just then little Hugh yawned, and rubbing his eyes, sat up in his cradle. His sister lifted him out and sat rocking him beside the fire.

* * * * *

May had come, beautiful, warm and sunny. Eloise no longer had to remain indoors. She took Hugh for daily walks. The little fellow could toddle beside her now. She took him two or three times a week to the cemetery, and while she knelt beside her mother's grave, he ran about jabbering pretty, babyish nothings. One evening as they were coming home from one of their usual walks, Hugh espied a dappled hobby-horse

in one of the shop windows, and his baby heart warmed to it at once. She lifted him up to get a closer view of the pretty toy, and baby stretched out two tiny, coaxing hands and jabbered to it lovingly; as she moved away he cried for it. "Hush, Hugh, darling," the girl murmured consolingly. "Wait until Jack gets well, and he will get you one a great deal nicer than that."

Jack had not been well for a month, and, consequently, had not been working. He had been compelled to draw upon his surplus funds until they had almost disappeared, and little Hugh had to go without many things which otherwise he would have had. But the baby heart refused to be comforted, and Eloise could not repress her own tears while he was sobbing in disappointment. Upon turning a corner she came face to face with Serrell Levare. He lifted his hat, smiled and passed on. But the girl wondered what he thought of her, for her lips were trembling—her eyes full of tears. She hurried home, for Jack was alone, and it was getting late. Hugh had fallen asleep, but was sobbing still. The girl's heart grew very bitter toward the world. She wondered if she would go on living in obscurity and poverty all her life. She had been told when she was at school that a bright future was before her; but that future was long in coming, she mused. Jack lay on the lounge asleep. How pale he was! It touched her heart to see him growing so thin and white. Jack had been too closely confined of late. But where was the remedy for it? They had to live, and she could not help him. Mrs. Maxcy was in the dining-

room, putting away the tea dishes. She was singing some quaint old song as she worked. Eloise sat in the gathering twilight, and in her mind a plan for her future was forming. Sometimes a dream came to her—a dream whose realization would have seemed unattainable to anyone whose ambition were not indomitable. She never spoke of her aspirations, but in her heart they took shape and life. She went to the piano and commenced to play. Her fingers dwelt long on a deep minor chord which she had just learned. She let its music fill her soul. It spoke to her desolate heart of hope, and filled her life with a longing which her lips could not express. She thought of the time when she had played and sang with her dead mother in other days—days that were all sunshine, but alas! gone forever, and her heart rebelled bitterly against this freak of a cruel destiny. Some one came up the steps, and, pausing at the door, rapped sharply. Mrs. Maxcy answered the summons, and came into the room carrying a large package.

"A boy gave me this for you," she said. "A white boy, and he said a young man sent it."

"I wonder whom it could have been," Eloise said, as she undid the package in nervous haste.

"I didn't ask him," the good woman replied. "He seemed to be in a hurry."

The package was addressed to Eloise in large scrawling capitals, and as the paper fell off she uttered a little cry. It was the hobby horse which baby had so coveted. To one foot was attached a card on which was hastily pencilled: "To Master Hugh Venarez. From a friend."

A few evenings later Serrell Levare opened the gate of the Van Worth yard and sauntered into the house. He went through the sitting-room and library, but not finding his cousin he made his way to her own special boudoir, and paused at the door. He heard a slight noise inside and rapped.

"Who's there? Is that you, Serrell?" a shrill girlish voice called. "Come in."

"Thanks," he replied. "What are you driving at? Eating, as usual, eh?"

"Yes," she replied, rising. "Mamma and I were so desperately hungry we couldn't wait for papa and you any longer; and it was merely to satisfy a caprice of mine that she allowed me to have it in here. Come and have some tea with me," filling a dainty Dresden cup she held with that beverage. "Now, don't say you won't, Serrell," looking coaxingly at him, and pushing his cup and the sugar toward him. "This is really excellent, I assure you, and I want you to try it."

"Yes, I don't object seriously to some tea," he returned, slowly stirring it. "I'm a little hungry this evening."

"That's right. Now let me light a lamp. It's so dark I can't see."

Levare sipped his tea, while his cousin lighted a lamp on a nearby table.

"Now talk to me," she said. "I'm just dying to chat with someone. I've had nobody to talk to all day. Mamma is in the mumps, and won't talk at all. Don't know why, unless she imagines that papa has his eye on another woman, and

don't love her any more," with a wicked little laugh.

Serrell raised his eyes to her face and smiled. She was a pretty little creature, this cousin of his. Her house dress of pale blue silk showed off her wild rose complexion, and short, boyish curls of an undeniable dark red, to perfection. Her nose was small, piquant and freckled; her eyes were brown and mischievous, and she had a peculiar way of half closing them when she regarded you. Two deep dimples gave her the appearance of being younger than she really was. Her mouth was small and red, and turned up at the corners—a sure sign of good humor—her smile irresistible, and it was a perfectly charming face that was just opposite him. The young man watched her curiously as she sipped her tea.

"Where is aunty?" he asked suddenly, not looking up.

"Oh, she finished a few moments ago and went into her room. She's working hard to finish that new linen centre-piece she began yesterday. She's had me at one all day, too, and I despise it. I hate to work anyway; it's galling to the flesh, it is," laughing.

There was a moment's silence.

"What's the matter with you? Grieving?" she questioned suddenly. Serrell pushed back his cup.

"No. Zida, why don't you and Aunt Anna drive around to see Jack Venarez' sister? I heard her say she used to know Mrs. Venarez before she was married; yet she never went about her during her illness, nor when she died. The

girl has lost her father since then, and yesterday I heard that Jack and the little boy were both ill. In fact Jack has been unable to be out for a long time; and the poor girl is all alone with them to care for. I swear it's a shame. Aunt Anna pretends to be such a Christian, and belongs to two or three so-called humane societies, and yet she never goes near those people. It takes a woman to be thoroughly niggardly and mean when she sets her head. Why don't you go to see that girl, Zida?" blushing slightly.

Zida's chin was resting in her white jeweled hand.

"I have never thought of it," she said at last, "though what you say is true, Serrell, quite true," contemplating him through her half-closed brown eyes. "Why shouldn't I go to see her? She has such a sweet face. I have seen her several times; she and her little brother. He is such a pitiful looking child. I wonder mamma has not gone to see them, and I am surprised that I have not thought of that before. It is a shame, Serrell—a downright shame. I'll go down there to-morrow."

Levare was satisfied. He knew his cousin always kept her promise, and that she never did anything by halves. Zida had told the truth. She had not thought of it. So she went, and a friendship was formed between them that was never afterwards broken. As the days went on the two were much together. They played and sang, and Zida kept Eloise supplied with books. She detested anything but the Duchess' novels, she told Eloise on one occasion when she had

brought several historical works at Eloise's request; and she didn't see how she endured them. But Eloise had taken a fancy that she would some day make literature a profession, and in her spare time she applied herself to reading most assiduously. Zida played brilliantly for one of her age, but anyone could see her music was purely mechanical. Often she took Eloise and Hugh out driving. Poor little fellow! How he enjoyed those rides! And how few diversions his short, cramped existence had known! He was looking pale, and Eloise fancied that he needed something—a change—she knew not what. She had a miserable premonition that he would be taken from her, and she put the thought from her, for it was like the advance of death. Her starved heart clung tenaciously to her little brother. Zida told her that she and her cousin, Lillian Nevarro, were going to school in September, and the girl mused sadly how keenly she would feel her loss.

"There will be a whole month before we go off to the grind," she had said one day to Eloise. "How I wish I were you! I detest going to school!" Eloise regarded her incredulously. Did she mean it? She was rich and beautiful, yet devoid of ambition. She had one of the best music instructors in the South, and she had been taking dancing lessons off and on all her life; but she hated the sight of books. Serrell and Zida had become regular visitors at the small, well-kept cottage on South Street. He and Jack became chums, though their dispositions formed a peculiar contrast. Eloise was no longer lonely, and many happy hours were spent in that quiet,

little sitting room. Zida and Jack laughed and chatted, while Eloise played and sang for Serrell, or discussed with him something she had read; for Serrell was a great lover of books, too.

* * * * *

It was now the last of October. Jack had been ill for six weeks with typhoid fever, and he had been very near death's door. Night after night Eloise had watched beside him, and she looked very pale and worn as a result. This was the darkest epoch in the girl's short life. All their little savings had been exhausted long ago, and Jack lay weak, pale and utterly helpless. Hugh was not well either, and Eloise noted with growing alarm that he grew daily more pale and thin. He needed medical attention, she knew, but she was perfectly penniless. They could hardly live. Her friends were away at school, and she was alone. Mr. Van Worth had called once or twice to see Jack, for he liked his young clerk, and promised to hold his situation open for him, and said his salary should go on. They were thankful for that; but his salary was not large at best, and doctor's visits and large bills are synonymous terms. So poor Eloise found herself unavoidably short of funds. She had just been trying to feed Hugh, but it was not good, and baby turned away with a sad cry. All that night the girl lay awake thinking—thinking bitterly. What would become of them? There was no one for her to go to in her trouble. Ada and her aunt had been gone all summer. Once she thought of appealing to Jack's employer for aid. But no; she couldn't make up her mind to do that, for Mr. Van Worth

had already shown them marked generosity. Mrs. Van Worth had never been to see them, and she knew how ill Jack had been, too. Once she tried to pray, but her heart was too bitter. What had she ever done, she questioned passionately, to deserve such punishment? They had sold the piano three weeks ago, but it was old, and second-hand furniture never commands a great price. In a distant belfrey a bell was tolling mournfully. It smote upon the girl's senses like the knell of doom. It broke her heart to see baby growing so pitifully pale and thin, when money could have brought color to his wan little face. In after years Eloise thanked God that she had not been tempted then. She could hold out against the clamorings of her own body; she was afraid she could not have seen Jack and Hugh suffer, if it had come to the worst, and it had lain in her power to save them. When she told Mrs. Maxcy her trouble, that good woman could offer no advice, but mournfully shook her head and "wished to goodness she could help her."

Jack was in that dreadfully weak state of convalescence when one takes no interest in anything, feeling that such an effort would be too great a tax on one's powers of recuperation.

The next morning Eloise asked Mrs. Maxcy to stay with Jack until she could go down town. She had thought of everything, but her mind was now quite made up.

"But you are not going to take Hugh?" the good woman questioned as she came in and found Eloise dressing her little brother. "He will be so heavy for you to carry."

But she said she was going to take him, and putting on his little cap, she took him up in her arms, and started off almost on a run. She walked on and on, until her head ached, and she was very tired. At last she entered a store that advertised hair goods, and walking up to the proprietor, asked what he would give her for her hair, at the same time putting Hugh down and unpinning it, allowed it to fall in a rippling mass below her waist. The manager stood quizzically surveying the girl through half-closed eyes.

"Well, Miss," he said hypocritically, "it's not the shade to command a very good price——"

The girl turned her appealing blue eyes to his. It seemed her very life depended upon his answer. He regarded her silently a moment. He was not a very lenient young man, but something in the girl's expression touched him.

"I guess I can give you eight dollars for it," he said.

"Very well," the girl replied, with a weary sigh, though a little catch in her voice told him how relieved she was, "please have it cut at once."

So an elderly woman with short gray hair and a kindly light in her blue eyes, came forward, and Eloise was soon deprived of what it had taken her years of care to produce. The young man counted out her money. She received it like one in a dream. She hurried on, for it was growing cool, and the girl shivered. All around her there was life—the ever-shifting, shuffling, bustling life of a busy city. She knew no one, and no one cared to know her. She felt like one looking on in a life-like panorama—she could see, and feel,

and know, but was not of them. Her arm ached under Hugh's weight. Once she looked up as a magnificent coupe, drawn by a pair of beautiful bays, dashed by. She saw the face of Mrs. Van Worth. She did not recognize Eloise, however, but addressed some light remark to her companion—a slender, pale woman, who leaned wearily back on her luxurious cushions. The girl's heart grew bitter to bursting. Ah, well! No one cared for her. No one would care if she dropped dead on the pavement—she and baby Hugh Ah! there is nothing sadder in life than to feel that we are nothing to anyone; that should we die we would not be missed! It has been truly said that no matter how great one may be, his place can be filled. Then how can anyone rise so high in his own estimation as to imagine that the world would go to speedy destruction in case of his inevitable demise?

Hugh had been trying to walk, but he couldn't keep up with his sister, so she took him up in her arms again. Presently she entered an office over which hung a sign: Dr. J. C. Downs.

When the worthy doctor had examined baby's mouth he gave forth the edict that he was getting ready to cut his eye-teeth.

"Has he always been delicate?" he asked.

"No, he was always a hearty little fellow until a month ago," the girl answered.

"Yes, his system is much weakened," the physician went on, with that usual sang-froid with which those of the profession generally impart unwelcome information to us. "You must be very careful of him. I will write him a prescrip-

tion which you can take down to my drug store and have prepared."

Little Hugh had been making a critical examination of the furniture in the room; with his head turned to one side, his peculiar bright brown eyes very wide open, he jabbered interrogatively.

"He seems to be a bright little fellow," the doctor said, as he handed Eloise the prescription.

"He is," she replied, drawing the little one affectionately toward her; "he's just as bright as he can be; too much so I fear."

"Oh, no," added the little man, briskly, twisting in his chair; "that old superstitious theory is out of date. I don't believe in such things. Give him good nutritious food—oatmeal and milk, and take good care of him and he'll soon be all right."

The girl handed him his fee, and taking Hugh up again, bade him "good evening" and left. The doctor's words beat like a hammer through her brain: "Give him good nutritious food!" Ah, heaven! how was she to do it?

She had but seven dollars now, and she had not yet paid for the medicine. That would surely be another dollar. Then she had five to pay for house rent, and that would leave her but one dollar. The landlord knew the poor girl's circumstances perfectly—that she had a sick brother, no money, and nowhere to go; and yet he told her that unless the rent was paid they must move out. He whose own daughter had never known want; but only luxurious ease all her life. He had no immediate need of the money which had cost the poor girl such a bitter pang to procure. The lit-

tle that would have meant life and hope to that destitute family went to purchase rum with which to regale several kindred spirits, all as wealthy and soulless as himself.

When Eloise came out of the supply house, where Jack had always run an account, she was perfectly penniless. She told the obliging clerk to send her purchases to her, and turned her face homeward. It was quite a mile now, and a dreary October rain was falling. The street lamps were lighted—night was coming on. Baby had fallen asleep, and Eloise wrapped her cape closer around him and hurried on. A small boy ran down the opposite sidewalk, shrilly crying the *Evening Journal*. A garrulous old parrot on the corner mocked him. On turning an abrupt corner she passed an organ grinder—a weather-beaten old man whose hair was snowy white, and the placard which hung from his neck said that he was blind and importuned help. The girl looked at him a moment mournfully, wishing that she could help him, and hurried on. A gamin gazed curiously up into her face. She felt weak and faint. Then she remembered that she had not broken her fast since the night before. She wondered she had not broken down sooner; but suspense and anxiety had supported her. She paused for a moment beneath a flaring street lamp, leaning heavily against it. Just then the curious bootblack who had passed the moment before came up to her.

"Miss," he said, "you look sick. Let me carry the kid for you."

With an effort she roused herself. "Yes, I be-

lieve I am ill. I shall be very thankful if you will carry baby for me awhile," she said, laying the sleeping child into the outstretched arms of the little urchin. "Is he not too heavy for you?"

"Oh, no mum!" he replied reassuringly, as he trudged onward a few feet ahead of her; his small, soiled satchel containing his brush and blacking suspended from his shoulder. Eloise noted how rough his little bare feet were, and how ragged his coat and cap. But he had a heart! And, after all, is it not those who have suffered most who feel most for those who suffer? At the gate she took the baby.

"Won't you go in?" she asked, as the little fellow opened the gate for her. "I can't thank you sufficiently for your kindness. Perhaps some day I may have an opportunity to return the favor. What is your name?"

"My name is Fred Howard," he said politely, touching the tattered cap, "and I live in Jackson's Alley. Don't thank me, mum. I allers helps folks when I can."

And the little fellow touched his cap again, and disappeared in the fast gathering darkness.

* * * * *

That night Eloise lay down feeling that she had done her whole duty. By her noble sacrifice Jack and little Hugh were not hungry, and there was enough food to last them for several days. She slept soundly, but was awakened by baby's crying. His little hands were burning hot. All the next day he lay in a stupor. Jack, in his anxiety, forgot his own weakness and tried to help himself. Eloise constantly held Hugh in her

lap. She wished the doctor would come. She did not like that dazed, unreal expression in baby's eyes.

"Do you think he is seriously ill, Eloise?" Jack asked, bending over the flushed face of his little brother. The girl's voice choked, and two tears fell upon the nervous little hands of the sick child.

"I don't know, Jack. I'm afraid he is," she faltered. "I don't believe he knows me."

When Dr. Downs had felt the fitful little pulse he shook his head gravely. The blood receded from the girl's heart, and she turned the color of ashes.

"Don't speak," she implored. "You needn't tell me. Oh, God, not that—not that!"

Mrs. Maxcy took the little sufferer from the stricken sister's arms. And Eloise went blindly from the room. The doctor turned to Mrs. Maxcy.

" We can do nothing. He has congestion, and all such cases terminate fatally. He will die about dark, I think. Keep him quiet, and afterward try to console his sister. Poor child! I have never seen such devotion!"

Jack had left the room too—a stricken, pathetic look on his face. Something in that set little face told him that Hugh was leaving them. In a few moments the doctor stepped softly across the hall to where Eloise was lying face downward on an old sofa. As he approached her she raised her tearless eyes questioningly to his.

"I am going now," he said. "He is dying, and

I can do nothing. You will need someone. Whom shall I send to you?"

"There is no one to send," she answered, sadly enough.

"What!" he exclaimed in considerable surprise. "Have you no friends here?"

Then as she shook her head, "You must have someone. But don't worry. I will see that you have company. Try to think it is for the best," he went on, with an attempt at consolation. "Some day, when you have lived as long as I have, you may be able to recall this bitter hour with resignation, aye—even with gratitude, for he will be forever beyond life's pitfalls then; while had he lived to be a man and then have been called away unexpectedly you could not be sure as you now are, what his future portion would be. Think of that!"

She turned away from him. How empty such consolation can seem, though offered in all sincerity, when we hear it by the death-bed of a loved one!

After he had gone she opened the front door and went slowly out. She did not notice a carriage drawn up before the gate. After a moment she found Jack seated on the back steps. He was weeping bitterly. She sat down beside him and twined one arm affectionately around his neck.

"Eloise, he is dying!" he sobbed brokenly, as her loving touch added the *finis* to his already overcharged heart.

"He is almost gone."

"I know it, Jack," she said, and then she, too,

wept; her terrible rigidity gave way at last, and a flood of tears relieved her burdened heart.

Thank God for tears! The dam that has an outlet seldom breaks; and tears which give vent to the heart's emotions often save it from breaking. The stars came out one by one, and still they sat there; his face buried in his hands—her arms around his neck. Someone came up and took one of their hands in each of hers, and pressed them in sympathy. Then Ada Dalton spoke:

"Eloise? Jack? What can I say to you?" she went on, her voice choked. "Why didn't you let me know? I came as soon as I heard it. We only arrived to-day."

They were silent for a moment. Presently someone came around the house and laid a hand on Eloise's shoulder. "Come inside, dear; he is gone. But, oh! he looks so serene—so happy! It is a sin to grieve for one who looks like that."

It was Mrs. Van Worth.

CHAPTER III.

A CHANGE OF FORTUNE.

Time passed. It was mid-winter. Eloise and Jack went on their ways as usual. Fortune had smiled upon Eloise, or at least she liked to consider it such. She had been engaged as reporter for the *Journal,* a daily paper, at a salary of fifteen dollars a month, and which, though small, formed a very welcome addition to Jack's somewhat meagre salary. She loved the work, and devoted most of her time to it, for alas! she had plenty of time now! Jack had received a letter from his grandfather saying if he would come and live with him until his death he would make him his sole heir. At first the proposition staggered the boy. Then he thought of his sister and decided he would not leave her. No wealth could make him give her up.

"Go, dear, by all means," said she, after reading the letter, though her heart ached. "It is your duty, and your one chance of wealth. I have no rich relatives to endow me, you know; and you can do more for both of us by accepting his proposition than you can ever hope to do by rejecting it," she urged, while her soul cried out against the cruel separation which this acceptance would necessarily demand. So Jack resigned his

place at the office, and bidding his sister a fond farewell, set out upon his journey. Eloise was very lonely then, though she heard from Zida constantly. She congratulated her upon her success as a journalist, for Mrs. Van Worth had sent her several copies of the *Journal,* and in them she had read Eloise's society notes, and they were splendidly done and showed remarkable ability for one so young. Then Ada came often as of yore, and Eloise often returned her visits. In her new field of labor Eloise was admitted into circles which otherwise she would not have been, and many a susceptible young man lost his heart to the beautiful, high-browed girl as she appeared at every social function in her role as reporter and quietly looked on and jotted down what was passing before her. One night at a german Eloise was present as usual. She was standing just inside the entrance, book and pencil in hand. She was looking unusually pretty. At the other end of the hall two young men stood lazily discussing the appearance of our young heroine. One was tall and fair; both were aristocratic looking. The other was dark—black mustache, and hair and eyes of a peculiar penetrating black. His easy bearing and perfect manners proclaimed him of the beau monde. Once Eloise glanced in their direction, and a faint flush suffused her fair face as she met the burning regard of the darker man fixed upon her face. The other she recognized as Earle Nevarro. He was looking at her very intently, and tugging at his mustache. But when her eyes met his he averted his face slightly. Not so with Ballette. There was a look of challenge

in his eyes; their very look were an insult. Eloise did not look in that direction again.

"Who is she, Nevarro?" the dark man was saying, "Isn't she a beauty, though?"

"Fine little girl," returned the other quietly. "I've seen her before somewhere." The other suddenly stood erect.

"Then do introduce me, old man, won't you?"

"That I cannot do," said Nevarro, "for I have never met her myself. I said I had *seen* her somewhere."

"Well, she's a little daisy, no mistake about that; and I'll wager a fellow could have a big time with her, you know. The bad part of it is that these stunningly pretty ones are always beyond our reach. It's a shame so pretty a little creature should have to scratch for a living like that."

Eloise turned, for someone had touched her arm. It was Ada.

"Why, Eloise," she said, smiling, "you here? Why don't you dance? When have you heard from Jack? Is he well? See how smitten my fellow is on you! I'm positively jealous!"

The next moment she was whirling around in the dark young man's arms. Eloise watched her. His face was bent over hers; his eyes looked down into her own; he said something to her—she smiled, blushed furiously and smiling happily, lowered her eyes. Eloise looked across at Nevarro. He was standing where Ballette had left him; his eyes were following them everywhere. A peculiarly rigid expression was on his

handsome well-bred face. As the dance was ending Eloise slipped away.

"There," Ballette said, after returning, flushed and excited from the waltz. "Where is she? Gone? Too bad! I was in hopes that she would drop her handkerchief or book or something, so I could pick them up for her, and have the pleasure of hearing her say 'thank you,' if no more. Strange, isn't it, such things never occur outside of novels?"

That night Eloise could not sleep. Before her mind's eye there passed the scene she had just witnessed. She remembered what Ada had told her a year ago. She had said that Earle would be jealous if he knew of her receiving the attentions of Ballette. But it was not jealousy she had seen depicted on Nevarro's face. It might have been regret or fear, but never jealousy. Eloise wondered how she could be insensible to Earle's attentions. He seemed so much quieter, so much more like true metal.

* * * * * * * * * *

It was now Spring, and everything seemed to herald the approach of Queen Summer. The trees bordering the avenue were beginning to put forth their leaves; the birds warbled blithely in the small hedge behind the garden on South Street. Eloise had been very successful, and received a much increased salary. Jack had written begging her to give her work up, saying that he would send her enough money to enable her to be idle; and that if she still persisted he should come home. So at last, after much deliberation, and after receiving several threaten-

ing letters from Jack, the girl, a trifle regretfully, perhaps, went to the Journal office and turned in her work for the last time. The editor offered her another raise in salary, but she declined, saying that she was going to eschew journalism altogether. She had met Ballette one evening in the office. He had been standing with one of the Journal reporters conversing, and who had very presumptuously presented his friend. The girl resented this impromptu meeting; for though she was young and poor, she had the principles of a lady. Several times he had accosted her on the street, and had attempted a conversation; but she treated him as a stranger. He was persistent, however, and was not as lightly shaken off as the girl had imagined, for he had set his heart upon—no, not upon marrying her, for men of his stamp seldom marry. Eloise was only sixteen, and girls of that age are apt to find loneliness monotonous. So at last, against her better judgment, she allowed him to call. Why if he was not honorable, she reasoned with her accusing conscience, did society not ostracize him from its circles? And why did Ada Dalton receive him at her home? She learned to love and trust him for a girl of her age unless very liberally educated, is apt to think her lover pure, as she herself is pure; and it was a bitter awakening to poor Eloise when a few months later she learned of his perfidy—his evil intentions toward herself.

"So *that* is your motive for seeking me, is it?" she said one night as she stood pale and trembling with anger before him. "So you have de-

ceived me! You have flattered and made love to me all this time with *this* end in view! I wish to heaven that every mother in this town knew of what you are—you scheming villain! I wish they could see you in your true light as I see you now; trying to destroy a poor girl who has no one to protect her. I wish they all knew what I now know of you! Leave me! Never dare speak to me again!"

When he had gone she ran blindly up the stairs to her room, and flinging herself down on her bed burst into tears. The strain she had undergone had been too much.

CHAPTER IV.

A HAPPY REUNION.

One day as she came in from a trip down-town her eyes suddenly fell upon a letter on the dressing case before her. It was addressed to her, and bore the city postmark. Hurriedly tearing it open she read:

"Dear Eloise:—Serrell and I are at home on a short vacation. We will call around to see you this afternoon. Have just discovered where you are. Zida."

A flood of mingled sensations surged over her. She was glad they were coming; yet she dreaded to meet Serrell, for she had an idea that she had treated him rather shabbily. He had written her twice, but she had not replied. Then at Christmas he had sent her a new book and a box of delicious bonbons. This she had been good enough to acknowledge. Since September he had been attending a school of law in Virginia. Eloise donned her prettiest dress in honor of the expected guests; and while she waited she busied herself in putting finishing touches to her room. She had but little to do now, so she read and wrote a great deal; before Jack left he had found her a very comfortable boarding place with a good motherly woman just

outside of the city limits, and Eloise could roam the beautiful flower garden and extensive, well kept grounds at will. It took her sometime to grow accustomed to the life of ease which was her portion now, and she was somewhat reluctant to leave South Street and Mrs. Maxcy; but Jack had insisted, and Jack's word was law with Eloise. So the day before he left she had been comfortably installed in her new home. She promised to see Mrs. Maxcy once in awhile, and after presenting her with a small amount of currency, left her standing in the doorway, ever and anon raising her apron suggestively to her eyes.

An hour later Zida and Serrell came. They did not stay long, however, for Zida announced that they had come to carry Eloise home with them—Lillian Nevarro was at home and she wanted Eloise to meet her. At last she gave a reluctant consent. They were shown into the Van Worth drawing-room, and a fair young girl who was sitting at the piano rose to greet them. She murmured something about being pleased to meet Eloise, but her manner was very forbidding. Her eyes—a pale blue—had that languorous expression one so often sees in girls of her position. Her hair was a light straw color, and she was white to paleness. Mrs. Nevarro had never encouraged her daughter's indulging in gymnastics or other health-giving exercises. She was dressed in the height of fashion. During the conversation which followed she addressed as few remarks to our friend as possible, and ignored her as nearly as

is in any way consistent with good breeding. Eloise was quick to notice this, but she appeared quite indifferent. Zida had changed but little since Eloise had first known her. She was just as pretty as ever, and had as great a fondness for bonbons and matinees; and the same charming disregard for modern etiquette as of yore. Her dresses were slightly lengthened, which fact succeeded in giving her a more womanly aspect. Serrell had changed but slightly, too, but his face was graver than of old. He always seemed preoccupied, a habit which Eloise admired immensely. He conversed very little, but when he did speak, his words usually conveyed to his hearers some profound thought; some idea worth considering. Mrs. Van Worth had excused herself and left the room for a moment, and Serrell had asked Zida to play. It was evident that he had noticed Miss Lillian's freezing civility toward Eloise, and resented it. Zida had pleaded an excuse, and so it devolved upon Lillian to turn her musical talents to some account.

"Why did you not answer my letters?" he asked, as Lillian began playing the newest two-step.

"Didn't I?" she asked, while the hateful color mantled cheek and brow. She kept her eyes bent upon the carpet. She wondered if he would blame her much if he knew all she had passed through since they were together last. She had not thought very much about her neglect when alone; but now, with his deep, searching eyes upon her, she felt that she had been exceedingly unkind, and that he was reading her very soul.

Her face was a little flushed as she looked up into his eyes. "Didn't I? I think you are mistaken."

"I'm afraid not," he says decidedly, but with a slight smile as he read her embarrassment. "Perhaps the mails were at fault. I think you might have written occasionally. It is hard to feel one's self forgotten." The girl's face grew a shade paler.

"If I did not," she said, "I think I am to be excused. I have experienced a great sorrow since I last saw you."

She looked at him now, and her eyes were bright with unshed tears.

"Yes; you don't know how deeply I sympathized with you," he said earnestly. "Aunt Anna wrote me of your misfortune, and I wrote you a letter of condolence. After that I sent you another. I waited a long time for an answer, but none ever came."

Just then Mrs. Van Worth entered the room, and Serrell colored slightly. Mrs. Van fancied that Eloise looked slightly conscious, too.

"Do you hear from your brother often, Miss Venarez?" she questions quite amiably, sinking into an easy chair.

"I hear every week. I don't think I could endure his absence if I did not."

"Yes, I know you miss him. When is he coming home?"

Eloise replied that she did not know exactly; but just as soon as he could finish his business out there.

Suddenly Zida spoke: "You have stopped

writing for the papers, haven't you, Eloise? I never see any of your articles now."

"Yes," the other said. "I'm not writing now."

Zida regarded her a moment, smiling slightly.

"I used to enjoy your letters so much. Mamma sent me a paper every week; and it always made me more homesick than ever when I read your society items. You should make writing a profession, Eloise. I think you have great talent."

"I once thought so, too," replied Eloise sadly, "but I couldn't get the publishers to agree with me. They refused two of my best literary efforts, which almost destroyed my ambition."

CHAPTER V.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

Four years have passed swiftly since we last looked into the small, tidy room of our heroine. She is still where we left her, though she is not quite the same. She has changed and developed wonderfully. Her figure was the envy of every woman whom she met, and the admiration of every man. She carried herself like a young princess, and her face was charming. One glance at her figure and profile and we would say that she did not resemble herself; but when she raises her eyes we see that they have not changed—they are still soft and appealing and childish, and are her most beautiful feature. Zida and her cousin, Lillian Nevarro, were at home now. So also were Earle Nevarro and Serrell Levare. They had finished their education, and the former had been travelling about until a month previous. Society had experienced a sudden revival then, for Nevarro had always been one of the Frivolous Dame's favorites. Serrell had finished his course of law and had been admitted to the bar. Ada Dalton had been gone from home for three months, visiting distant relatives. Several times when she and Eloise had been together she had been almost persuaded to tell her

of her knowledge of Ballette's character, and to warn her; but a false idea of modesty had prevented her. She did not wish Ada to know that she had ever known him, for in all their visits Ada had never mentioned his going to see her. Perhaps he had kept his visits a secret from her. Zida and Lillian were "coming out" soon; but as for that they had been "out" all their lives. Jack Venarez had come home twice during the first two years of his absence; but his grandfather had managed to get his affairs into a financial tangle, and as a result he had not been home for two years. Eloise shed many tears over this unavoidable state of affairs, which she was wont to term neglect; for though he wrote every week it did not compensate her for his absence. She had his picture in her hand to-night, as she sat there alone, and she found it almost impossible to identify this great, well developed young man with his fashionable appearance as the same dear old Jack of South Street. She put the picture away in her trunk, and drying her eyes she went back to her seat near the window and looked out. A closed carriage drove up to the door and stopped. She wondered who it could be at that late hour. While she stood watching a young man sprang to the ground, and ran up the steps and loudly clanged the door bell. Eloise listened. The door was opened a second later, and she heard the newcomer address a few words to the landlady. That voice! No wonder Eloise turned from the window, her heart in her throat at the sound of it! She stood expectant—waiting. Somebody was coming upstairs three

steps at a time. Then suddenly they paused before her door and knocked. The girl advanced quickly across the room and opened the door.

"Eloise, old girl, how *are* you?" cried her brother delightedly, and Eloise found herself in her brother's arms.

"I'm so glad you have come, Jack! What must I say?"

"Say nothing, you little goose. Why don't you faint? I'd feel better, I think."

He sat down upon a nearby chair and drew her onto his knee.

"Don't cry, old girl," he says. "If you're glad to see me that's a poor way you have of showing it," he goes on with characteristic drollery, "and I've so much to tell you, and to ask you, too. In the first place that accommodating paternal grandparent of mine took it into his wise old head to be especially obliging to me a week ago, and so Thursday morning when he failed to make his appearance at the usual hour I went to his room to ascertain the cause, and found somewhat to mine and the old lady's surprise that he had passed in his checks sometime during the small hours of the night. Well, he had already made a will in my favor, and so we buried him last Saturday, and I'm to receive two thousand annually until the old woman makes up her mind to follow his example. I really intended to wire you, Eloise, but I was so busy and so helped up with the idea of seeing you so soon that I forgot it. Then, too, I wanted to surprise you. In spite of all they have been kind to me, though I'll admit it has been a long time in coming.

They almost ate me up at first, but finally decided that there was too much of me to dispose of in that way. Now I must go back once more for a few days to straighten things up a bit for the old lady, and then I'll be with you after that like 'Johnson's yaller cat'—to stay. The old woman is going to sell out and to spend the remainder of her days with relatives, which is kind, I take it, as had she remained at home she would have wanted me to stay with her. Of course I was sorry to see the old man go," he said, "and I'm not ungrateful, either. I'd be a brute if I should repay all their many kindnesses with ingratitude. I grew to care for them quite as much as they did for me, and if at any time the dear old woman needs me I've told her that one line from her to that effect will bring me to her if I'm at the other end of the world."

"Ah! That is quite right, old boy," his sister said warmly. "That is the way I like to hear you talk. Fortune has been kind to us, though, as you say, it has been long in coming. We can still appreciate it. I'm so glad for your sake, Jack, and for my own, too, for if I never sell my stories now we will be able to hold our own."

"Yes," he said somewhat sadly, while he gazed meditatively into space; "so we can. It is certainly a lift for us; but we could have enjoyed it so much more had it come five years sooner."

"Yes, dear," his sister said gently, "there is always an 'if' between us and perfect happiness. I have often noticed it."

Then fearful lest he should make this first meeting one of sadness he said suddenly:

"I see you are not married yet. Are these fellows afflicted with blindness? Or have you decided to remain an old maid?"

The girl smiled. "Tell me something of yourself, Jack," she said.

"I?" he answers, somewhat surprised and stifling a yawn. "I shall never marry. I could not for the life of me make a selection. There is no woman so pure but there are others just as much so—none so beautiful but there are many just as beautiful. I could never tie myself to any one woman. Might see another I liked better, you know, when it was too late, and be miserable as hell; for I imagine that that would be the double-distilled quintessence of supreme torture. If there was but one woman in the world, and she was pretty, I might think of it. That she should be good to look at would be an immutable condition, however; for I could never love a plain woman. A man does not like to be an object of pity, and I've seen men with such positively ugly wives that I actually pitied them. I could overlook a good many faults in a woman if she were only pretty."

"There are other things to consider," Eloise ventures. "Her being beautiful could never atone for a lack of congeniality, I think."

"Oh, well," Jack goes on; "in case a man does sometimes get one not intended for him, the law has made a merciful allowance for that mistake in granting divorces. They've grown to be about as popular as marriages. That is—in some states. Talk about your modern evils! But that is the great social problem which confronts

us to-day, and for all it is being much discussed it does not receive near the consideration which it merits, and there seems to be no ready solution for this most vital and important question. We can boast mightily of taking the divine law as laid down in Holy Writ for our guidance here below, but when it comes as a barrier between man and his desires he usually makes the law a tool subservient to his will; for at best, we are selfish creatures all. But divorce and marriage aside, how are all the Van Worths? And are you as much attached to Mrs. Van as ever?"

He laughed, regarding Eloise for a moment curiously.

"Yes, we are on very good terms now. They are very nice to me. Zida is as she always has been; the dearest little girl in the world. She is awfully good to me."

Jack looked at her with a latent twinkle in his blue eyes.

"And what of Levare?"

"Oh, he is good, too," she said, laughing. "He asked me a lot about you."

"Does Ada still live at her old home?"

"Yes, but she has been off at school almost ever since you have been gone."

And so they chatted until the town clock announced the hour of midnight, and Jack took his departure.

* * * * *

Eloise was working away desperately at her book, despite her brother's warning that nothing but failure awaited her in that direction. She was on the last chapter now, and she felt very

hopeful, for she had taken infinite pains with her work, and she was sure that it contained merit, and she hoped that that quality could not always be ignored, even in an amateur; for how could she ever hope to become anything else if she was never given an opportunity of showing to the world that she had talent in that particular direction? She would have liked for a competent judge of literature to have read her book, and to have had the advantage of their opinion regarding its merits; but she was very proud, and if she failed in this, as in others, she was determined that none but herself and Jack should know of her disappointment. She concluded and sent it off. Shortly after Jack came into her room.

"Come downstairs, old girl," he said, "Levare is in the sitting-room, and, of course, he came to see you."

"I really do not think I can go, Jack," she said. "I'm afraid that I'm going to be ill. I have such a headache. Can't you plead an excuse for me?"

Jack looked at her a moment. "I wonder what you women would do if it was prohibited that you have headaches? Have heartaches, I fancy."

"Yes," she said, as he turned away; "we have that, too, sometimes."

She wondered if Levare would be disappointed. She should have gone, she mused.

When Jack again returned to her room after Levare had taken his departure he found her almost unconscious, with a wild light in her beau-

tiful eyes—a hot flush on her fair face. When a few moments later a physician was summoned he said she had a threatened attack of brain fever and she must be kept from all noise and excitement. Poor Eloise! She had a serious time for three weeks and her constant application to her last book had nearly cost her her life. She lay in her little iron bed drawn up close to the window so the June breeze might fan her fevered cheeks.

Zida came every day and brought her flowers. Her talk was light and frothy and seemed to revive Eloise. The doctor told her to continue coming; her visits seemed to do his patient more good than all the medicine he gave her. Upon several occasions Miss Lillian had come, too; and our heroine found her dislike for that young lady diminishing somewhat.

A few mornings later Jack came into her room and taking a seat near the bed, drew forth a letter from his pocket.

"Here is something for you," he said, "though I don't know whether I should have mentioned it just yet. Will you promise to take its contents logically, no matter what it is? You know the doctor said that worry would be very bad for you. It is concerning your book, I think. What if they do refuse to take it? You are not dependent upon your writing now."

Why should she care, sure enough? she questioned. Then she thought of the hopes she had based upon her work—upon that very book, and her heart beat with sickening dread.

"I will act rationally, Jack," she said at last. "You need have no fear."

She drew the letter forth with nervous fingers. "Miss Venarez: (it ran) We have accepted your story, and can make you the following offer——"

But she read no further. The letter fell from her nerveless hand. She stole one thin arm around her brother's neck, while the tears rained down her pale cheeks; tears of gratitude; tears of remorse—remorse that she had ever doubted the goodness of Providence.

"It is over, Jack," she said, drawing his head down to her own. "Thank God it is over! The way has been bitterly hard and dark, but the sun has come out at last."

"Yes, Eloise," he said tenderly, "such patience as yours must be rewarded. Be of good cheer, little woman. You will yet live to make your mark in the world."

Twilight fell softly, enveloping them in its dark mantle. A small spotted kitten which had been rubbing itself affectionately around the bed-post gave a peculiar, supplicating whine and sprang upon the bed, and coiling itself comfortably against the sick girl, purred contentedly.

Jack put his sister gently down on her pillows again.

"Just as soon as you are better," he said, "I want you to go with me and see the pretty home I've bought for us a few blocks from Zida's home. I know you will be pleased, Eloise. The location is beautiful. I have had this in mind ever since I left you four years ago. I have engaged Mrs. Maxcy to be housekeeper for you."

CHAPTER VI.

SUCCESS!

"Toil on, sad heart, courageously,
And thou shalt find thy dream to be
A noonday light and truth to thee."
—*Selected.*

"One Woman's Life" had been a great success, and our heroine was now no longer obscure, for in spite of her *nom-de-plume* Eloise had been discovered and letters of congratulation poured in upon her. She had been presented with a dozen copies of her book—a kindness of her publishers—and she was delighted. She had remembered Zida and Miss Lillian with a complimentary copy, and had received the most flattering notes of praise from those young ladies. Her ambition had reached its goal at last. Jack, true to his promise, had taken her to the beautiful brown stone residence on East Street, in one of the most aristocratic portions of the city. "For," said he, "I have learned from bitter experience that for one to become popular, and to be a success socially, one has got to live in a fashionable locality, and put on style and affect wealth whether one possesses it or not. There is also a certain degree of policy in patronizing only one

church," he continued one day to Eloise, "and in paying in just as much for the privilege of belonging to it as one can possibly spare."

Eloise had her own servants, among which Mrs. Maxcy was chief. The woman was now about as happy as is permitted mortals to be here below, for she had always predicted a sudden rise in the fortune of her young mistress, and now that the prophecy had come true, the good woman felt that she was in a measure responsible for the turn affairs had taken, and showed it by adding to her other numerous graces a pronounced and very ungraceful switch, an accomplishment which always convulsed Jack with laughter. Zida and Lillian had run in that morning and found Eloise in the morning room, whither she had gone from breakfast.

"Dear old girl, we've just come to congratulate you in person," Zida bubbled over, snatching the morning *Sun* from Eloise's hands and taking them in both of hers. "I've just finished the book and it is simply a treat. I wrote you the note when I had read it only half through—I was so pleased; and now that I have finished it I have come to tell you what I think of it. Suffice it to say that I had no idea that we had such talent in this town; less still did I dream that I numbered such a genius among my acquaintances; and to think it should be my old friend Eloise, who is the author of the most successful book on the market, and who is to be the social 'lion' of the season! The reviews are full of flattering accounts of it and it is in every one's mouth. Really, Eloise, it is quite enough to turn your

head. I shouldn't be surprised if you should 'cut' me altogether!"

"I'm sorry that you think so lightly of me, dear," Eloise answered, smiling a little in spite of herself.

"To think you would go and hide yourself behind an assumed name! Thekla, indeed! And the crowning cheeky act was when Lillian and myself received an anonymous copy, and there's no telling when we would have discovered your clever ruse if we had not happened to see an account of it in one of the new magazines. Why, if I could write like that do you think I'd try to hide my identity? I should think not! There are a few pages which I cannot understand; they are too far-fetched, or something, what do you call it? Well, anyhow, outside of that it is heavenly! Serrell thinks the parts which I cannot understand are the finest of all. You should hear him talk about it, Eloise. It would do you good."

She sank down on a low stool at Eloise's feet, and picking up the *Sun,* ran her eye over the locals. "I see here an announcement of Ada Dalton's and Mr. Ballette's marriage. Well they've decided upon it at last."

Eloise gave a quick sigh. She wondered if Ada would be happy with such a man. She was glad that he would marry her. She had not seen her in a long, long time.

"And here," continued Zida, "is an announcement of the ball—our ball. Just think of it! We've been trying on our dresses all the morning, Eloise, and I assure you they are dreams—

perfect dreams!" throwing her arms above her head in a most ungraceful yawn. "I feel stiff, just like a dress figure."

"My dear Zida," Eloise says calmly, an amused smile dimpling her fair face, "you seem to be looking forward to it very much indeed."

"Why shouldn't I? This is our ball, I'd have you understand; given in our special honor. It's only two weeks off, thank goodness! I'm real jealous of you, Eloise. You as a new literary star will take the shine off Lillian and me."

The door opened quiety and Jack's bushy head appeared.

"Jack, I don't believe you ever met Lillian, Miss Nevarro?"

The young man bowed. "No, and I had quite arrived at the conclusion that I never should, unless I took the trouble to introduce myself."

"I'm sure I had forgotten all formality," Zida said. "I'm so engrossed in the coming event. Do excuse me."

"We came," Miss Lillian said slowly, "especially to see and congratulate your sister on her new book. It is splendid."

"Don't you think it a shame, Jack," Zida said, with a reproachful glance at Eloise, "that she should hide it all from us?"

"Do you really think, Eloise," Lillian drawled, raising her languid blue eyes to those of her friend, "that it is possible for a woman to undergo all that 'Ruth' did and still be as pure as she?"

"Most assuredly I do, Lillian," Eloise replies, fixing her dark eyes on the carpet. The small

marble and gold clock chimed eleven; its light, silvery strokes echoing like soft music through the room. Suddenly Eloise looked off through the long French window, through which the magnolia-scented breeze stole in deliciously. Her eyes were unusually sad as she spoke.

"I knew a girl once who led just such a life, and who came out victorious in the end. Virtue is its own reward, you know."

There was a slight pause, broken only by the musical ticking of the little clock. Eloise spoke again.

"The reason I sought to conceal my identity," she said, looking at Zida, "is because I have found that for one to write a popular book nowadays, it must contain some striking points good or otherwise. This is a degenerate age, and the public clamor for something new—something sensational, and to me it is very humiliating to be known as the author of such a book. We writers are to be pitied; we cannot please ourselves as to what we write; we try to suit the public taste, and it is a difficult task."

"I hadn't thought of that," Zida said. "I think I'd run the risk, though, for the 'rep,' even though it were a little bad. I'm perfectly desperate, Eloise; I can't create a sensation in anyway. I think I shall go to smoking cigarettes, wearing bloomers, and riding astride. Perhaps that will attract attention."

She consulted her small jeweled time-piece, and rising, said:

"We must go Lill; it's nearly twelve. Come down this afternoon, Eloise," as she ran lightly

down the steps, and without waiting for Jack to assist her, sprang into the carriage, and Miss Lillian took her seat beside her. Zida leaned forward: "Of course, I'll expect you too," she called shrilly. "Bring your wheel. I've a new one, and I'll wager I can beat you in a race."

She touched up the spirited animal and dashed off down the street, leaving our friend Jack standing with the hot sun pouring down on his bare head.

"What a stunner!" he ejaculated, as he turned and walked slowly up the walk. "What a little vixen! Pretty though; no mistake about that; looks like a fashionably dressed French doll!"

He walked through the hall and into the drawing-room, where his sister had gone.

"Miss Lillian makes me cold; she looks like an iceberg," he said, drawing himself together in a vain attempt to shiver. I feel like shaking her to make the blood circulate—to wake her up. The other," he went on, dropping into a huge rocker, and crossing his legs, "if she isn't a twentieth century woman, then I've one yet to see!"

"Yes," said Eloise, going across to the long, low window and throwing open the blinds; "she and you should get on famously, Jack. I believe your views are somewhat similar; and I assure you that behind that smiling, careless exterior there beats as warm a little heart as you could find anywhere."

"Yes," he replied, vainly trying to twist an imaginary mustache; "but it would be difficult to touch it, I think; like the possessor, too small, I imagine."

He suddenly looked up, speaking abruptly, "It's a wonder to me that you two were ever friends. You are the last woman I should have thought would champion her cause, Eloise."

"Yes, and you are not alone in that, Jack," she says, taking a seat near the window. "I am aware that Zida and I are vastly different in every way; but I have learned to appreciate in these days those who do not forget an old, and by no means necessary friendship, as she has done. Zida Van Worth is a mystery. She seems all frivolity, but behind all that lies dormant a very determined will, utterly impossible to break when once she sets her heart on a thing. She was very kind to me, Jack, in the old days, when my friends were few; and now I wouldn't give her up for anything."

"Give her up? Why certainly not!" Jack said very emphatically. "I did not suggest that."

"I believe that Zida thinks I have a peculiar kind of influence over her some way. I know I love to study her. You know 'extremes meet'."

* * * * *

Very charming Zida Van Worth looked that June evening as she drove in her pretty carriage, handling the reins like an expert. Her pretty gown of pale blue set off her perfect little figure and dainty complexion to perfection. Her blue sailor hat lay in her lap, and her red gold curls, parted and held in place by moonstone-studded side combs, curled over her compact head and small ears in utter abandon. Her tiny hands were incased in long, white chamois gloves, and she drove at a pace that made poor Lillian hold

her breath, though she said nothing. She knew how futile it would be to remonstrate, as this small, headstrong cousin had her way in this as in everything else. Suddenly she slackened speed.

"Isn't he handsome, Lill?" she said, turning her brown eyes on her companion's face. "He's just immense."

"He?" asks Miss Lillian calmly, opening her eyes. "Who?"

"Why Jack Venarez, of course," replied her companion; "what other 'he' have we seen to-day that amounts to anything?"

"Oh!" said Miss Lillian, rousing herself with an effort. "Yes, he is rather good looking, I think; only I don't admire his style. I like dignified men. Why, did you notice how he bowed to me when you introduced us? He just nodded, and began talking as he would have done to Earle or Serrell, or any other man."

"Oh, dignity!" the small maiden replied. "That's the reason I like him—because he hasn't any dignity. Why, he's a perfect Apollo! You see I've known Jack Venarez for years. He used to clerk for papa, or be a book-keeper or something—I've forgotton what—and I used to run in every time I had a chance, and I just sailed right into him. Of course I had to be sharp about it, for papa has your old fogyish ideas Lillian, about propriety, and proper introductions, and all that rot. But he has sense, and he took the cue at once. I hate people you have to knock down with a hint before they can take it. He was always handsome, but I believe he gets more so

as he grows older. Did you notice what a pretty mouth he has? Really, I wouldn't mind kissing him a bit, would you?"

Miss Lillian bit her lip and winced. Her small cousin shocked her.

"He's my ideal of what a man should be," goes on Zida, determined to air her opinion. "If I had anything to do with laws I'd have this clause inserted: All introductions to be thrown out totally; and should this law be violated the offender to pay not less than one thousand dollars, and not more than three; or serve a term of two years in the penitentiary." She laughed. "They are such a bore, and they make one feel so formal. I believe in making friends of everybody. Why should we young women be taught to regard men as bugbears? Of course during the conversation you might casually ask them who they were."

Miss Lillian laughed.

"You see, if papa had known how I knew Jack he would have lectured me soundly. Nothing like being sharp, Lill. Take Serrell, for instance; There's your dignity! I feel like choking it out of him!"

* * * * *

That afternoon as Earle and his aunt, Mrs. Van Worth, were having a little chat on the veranda, Miss Lillian and Zida came in.

"Where have you been to-day?" Earle asks. "I should have known, though, for mother told me I'd find you here, or at the Venarez'. Since they moved up this way you've been going there pretty often. What's the attraction?"

"There's a mighty pretty girl for one thing," Miss Lillian said.

"And a regular heart-crushing boy for another," said Zida, as she dropped into a chair.

Earle smiled superciliously. "Quite enough, I'm sure," he said.

"You are not going to dress for dinner, girls?" Mrs. Van Worth asked, arching her delicately marked brows.

"No, mamma; do excuse us," Zida said, going over to her mother, and taking her hand—a pretty way she had that always won. I'm sure Earle will. We are so tired, and everything is excusable now, you know."

Whereupon they all went in to dinner.

"Serrell is not coming home?" Zida asked after they had taken their seats.

"No," Mrs. Van answers. "I sent his dinner to the office. How tired and worn out you girls seem! Right at the time you should be at your best; you will look like ghosts."

"Yes; won't they?" Earle said, looking up from his soup. "Zida is losing all her color—her chief charm. As for Lillian, she has never had any to lose."

Mrs. Van was very proud of her daughter's beauty, notwithstanding she worried secretly over her manners.

"Poor papa!" Zida sighed compassionately; "He's never at home. He and mamma will have to become acquainted after this fearful business crush is over. He comes home only once a day, at night, and then sometimes not until nearly midnight—he's so busy; though I believe mamma at-

tributes it to other causes," with a mischievous glance in her mother's direction. "I believe she has about arrived at the conclusion that he has become a confirmed club man in his old days."

Mrs. Van sighed. She was beginning to think herself an object of pity.

"Yes," she said. "I don't know what I'd do if it wasn't for Zida. It is so nice to think she is at home permanently. Mildred and I have had a lonely time of it for the past four years. Thank heaven it is over!"

"It doesn't seem likely that you will have that pleasure long, aunt," Earle says, with a sidewise glance at Zida. "Judging from appearances Zida doesn't intend entering that much dreaded state of spinsterhood."

Zida laughed—such a clear, ringing girl's laugh.

"Why no, my dear cousin, why should I? I'm sure worse looking chances than I are making right decent matches every day."

"Yes," Nevarro went on, "a fellow doesn't have to exert himself overmuch these days to possess a wife; the women attend to that. That reminds me of Bulwer's 'Coming Race'; the very laws of nature will be changed then, according to the author's statement, and all the lovemaking will belong to the fair sex. I wish this generation would adopt that idea."

"According to your views, it has," his sister said, somewhat coldly.

"I meant," he returns with some embarrassment, "that the indications are tending in that

direction. The custom is not quite universal yet. It bids fair to become so, I think."

They all arose, and Mrs. Van Worth led the way from the dining-room. Zida and Earle, however, passed on through the room and out into the conservatory. They made a very pretty picture, standing in the shade of a clump of magnolias—the great, golden bars of sunshine falling across their faces. Earle Nevarro was decidedly good looking. He had always shown a decided preference for Zida's society, and they had been mapped out as a very probable match. It had been a pet scheme with Mrs. Van Worth and Mrs. Nevarro to have them marry when they reached their majority, as a very easy way of solving the problem of keeping their respective fortunes undivided.

"Zida," he was saying, as they stood there, and the sun's slanting rays fell across her hair like burnished gold, "I have traveled the world pretty well over, and I have yet to meet the girl I am as fond of as I am of you. I have cared for you ever since we used to play dolls together, and I'm conceited enough to believe that you are not altogether indifferent to me, are you?"

"Why, certainly not, Earle," she replied, while a puzzled expression crept into her brown eyes, and running her white fingers through her short, curly hair, "I like you first rate, to be sure. Why?"

"I was thinking," he said, tugging in a manner somewhat perplexed at his heavy, fair mustache, "that we were both old enough to arrive at some

kind of a decision concerning ourselves and our future."

"Yes," she said, and the puzzled expression on her face deepened.

"I want to ask you," her companion went on, "if you think enough of me to be my wife."

"Oh!" she said, gaily; "that's it, is it? Earle you startled me, and I can truthfully give utterance to the threadbare and much ridiculed expression 'this is so sudden!' Who'd have thought that you were thinking of that? This is too ridiculous!" and she began laughing immoderately.

The young man colored painfully.

"Does the knowledge that I care for you amuse you to that extent?" he says, in a hurt voice and looking her squarely in the eyes.

"Yes, in that way it does," she replied. Then she sobered somewhat. "I think you'd better be 'off with the old love' first, you know. What caused Miss Dalton to give you the mitten, eh?"

"Let us not speak of her, Zida," he said, with a ring of sadness and regret in his voice. "She couldn't care for me, so that ends it. I care for you; that is what concerns us now."

But Zida jerked her pretty head back with a gesture of impatience.

"Oh, no, Earle! I couldn't think of marrying any man yet. We are both too young to think of that yet."

"I don't mean now," the young man said; "but after awhile, when you become tired of society's frivolities; don't yon think you could be satisfied with me then?"

"Oh, yes, perhaps," she answered, evidently

bored. "After a long time when I am no longer young and have ceased to care for enjoyment; then we will be married."

A dark frown gathered on the young man's face—a frown of displeasure.

"No we won't, either," somewhat shortly. "After you are wearing a cap and spectacles I won't want you."

Zida burst out laughing.

"My dear cousin you wear spectacles now, and a cap, too, sometimes."

Nevarro bit his lip. "It's no joke with me. I mean every word I say," he replied, evidently out of temper. "If you are ever going to marry me it must be within the next two years. You will be twenty then, and the woman who doesn't know her mind at that age is a fool!"

Zida stood for a moment thinking.

"Well," she said deliberately, "I will marry you at the expiration of two years upon certain conditions."

"Name the terms."

"That if at the end of the specified time I have not seen anyone I like better, I will marry you."

"Well, it's a bargain," he said. "Let us seal it with a kiss."

And just as they were sealing it, Mrs. Van Worth came to the window.

"Zida, you and Earle come inside. Lillian wants you to sing with her."

* * * * *

It was a beautiful wedding. The bride looked so happy and so trusting, as though she were giving up everything, and considered it most ex-

quisite bliss to do so. Everyone said the bridegroom was so handsome—so distinguished looking. Ada had begged Eloise to be first maid of honor, but the girl felt that she could not. She also pretended illness on the night of the wedding in order not to be thought rude; for she could not attend the reception given at Ada's home. She could not come in contact with Ballette. He had managed to shun her; and Eloise regretted exceedingly that her dearest friend would be his wife. As far as her pure soul could detest anything, she detested Ballette. On the eve before Ada's wedding she had gone to see her. It cost her a bitter pang to think that in the future they could not be so intimate; she felt an ungovernable jealousy in giving her childhood's friend up to this man. It did not seem like a marriage, but a sacrifice. They sat that evening in Ada's room together, almost in silence, while the cool magnolia-scented breeze drifted in. At last she rose to go.

"Do not love him too much, Ada," she said, kissing her. "Men are such fickle creatures; so do not put all your eggs in one basket. Remember the old poem: 'Love is of man's life a thing apart.' It is quite true, I believe. Unfortunately for us, we cannot do anything by halves; we must love with all our heart and soul, or not at all. It is our unhappy disposition. I remember hearing Mrs. Maxcy say once that it was a good idea to let your husband think that you are not wholly bound up in him; try to let him love you as much as you do him."

Ada had kissed her fondly.

"You dear, old incredulous thing. You are not worthy of an affectionate husband. Why, I know that Gerald loves me. He is bound up in me quite as much as I am in him. How can I but worship him? He adores me. Oh, Eloise, I could not live without his love—I could not. If he should ever cease to love me, and me only, it would kill me!"

"We never know how much we can endure, dear," Eloise says sadly, "until we are put to the test. Often times when one grows weary and longs for death, one finds that it is much harder to die than to live."

"I wish mother could know how happy I am now," Ada goes on dreamily. "I wonder if she does know. They say that heaven smiles upon all happy marriages. Then it must smile upon ours. I want you to meet Gerald, Eloise. I'm sure you would like each other," she went on, not noticing how white Eloise had grown. "You must come to see us often. We will only be away a week or ten days, and then you know where we will live."

"Yes," Eloise answered; "but you must not expect me to come so often, Ada; for I am always in my study now, busy writing. You must not wait for me to come. Do not let your husband cause you to forget your old friend," smiling a little sadly, perhaps. "I can't but be a little jealous of him."

"I'll never forget you, Eloise," the other said, quite seriously for her, and her eyes were bright with unshed tears. "I'll always love you, dear.

Not as much as him, you know; but very, very dearly."

Eloise walked down street to her home. Twilight was falling, and Ada's words rang in her ears.

CHAPTER VII.

HER FIRST BALL.

"But sweeter still than this, than these, than all,
Is first and passionate love—it stands alone,
Like Adam's recollection of his fall."

—*Lord Byron.*

The eventful night of the Nevarro ball rolled around, and Eloise found herself the center of attraction. She had been prone to think of this, her first ball with a feeling akin to dread. The first ball usually means a great deal to a girl, especially to one who has seen very little of life. But once in a carriage with Mrs. Van (who had called for her) she felt her embarrassment deserting her. Mrs. Van Worth glanced down at her daughter and at her protege with evident satisfaction.

She felt sure there would be none present who would eclipse them. The glare of the electric light fell full upon Eloise's face as they drove along in the balmy July air and revealed the softened curve of her beautiful throat like a pillar of marble against the pale blue lining of her white plush opera cloak; her face was calm and serene as the reflection of moonlight on some peaceful lake; her wondrously beautiful dark

eyes and her rich dark hair made a striking contrast to her exquisitely fair face. The irrepressible Zida was rattling away as usual.

"So you wore your dress low?" she was saying to Eloise, as they neared the scene of the festivities. "It's a wonder you did, though, you have such odd notions, Eloise, about such things, and it's beastly of you, too. You have such a pretty neck and arms, and you should not mind showing them. It's not nearly as low as mine, though," she went on.

They were nearing the house now. A hundred irridescent lights flashed from the long French windows, and Eloise drew her wraps closer about her with a little shudder which she could not repress.

They went into the cloak room where dozens of pretty girls in absolutely stunning gowns were standing before small mirrors. Suddenly she recognized one of the number.

"Why, Ada," she said in her soft musical voice, as she advanced to meet her, "how are you dear?"

The pretty brunette embraced her fondly. "You here, Eloise?" What a pleasure! How sweet you look to-night." She placed her arms around the other's waist in an affectionate schoolgirl fashion, and looked up lovingly into her face. "It makes me think of old times, Eloise," tenderly.

"I have not seen you since your marriage," the other said. "I had a severe headache that day and when we came out of the church I was driven directly home. I did not improve and con-

sequently could not attend the reception, but I sent my congratulations."

"I knew they were sincere," Ada replies, with a tender glance into the true eyes on a level with her own.

"Yes, yes; you may be quite sure of that. Is your husband here to-night?" The other blushed confusedly.

"No; he did not come with me."

* * * * *

The beautiful scene that met Eloise's eyes as she entered the ball room dazzled her. No pains or expense had been spared to make the occasion a success. Flowers there were in endless profusion, and the soft glow of the many colored lights of the gilded chandeliers fell with an enchancing radiance on the magnificent costumes, and was reflected with a certain defiant mockery in the cold glittering light of many diamonds. The ininvisible orchestra rendered the music softly seductive, and the whole affair reminded an onlooker of a brief realistic dream of a trip to fairyland. Almost the first person Eloise saw was Serrell Levare. He was standing beside Lillian Nevarro at the farther end of the room, and she, with her white gloved hands clasped lightly before her, was looking up at him, and chatting with more animation in her white face and languid eyes than Eloise had ever seen there before. She was dressed in a bewildering gown of silver net, draped over a delicate shade of blue satin, and Eloise thought she had never dreamed it possible for Lillian to look half so charming. Short-

ly after Earle Nevarro joined them, and Mrs. Ballette presented him to Eloise.

"I want to thank you," he said, in his low, deliberate way, after a few commonplace remarks, "for giving to the world such a book as 'One Woman's Life.'" She inclined her head with that enviable grace which was a part of her.

"I've been trying ever since it came out to meet you, and this is my first opportunity."

"Yes?"

"Since reading your story three weeks ago I have thought of nothing else but this meeting. I was given to understand that I should meet you here," twisting his mustache with one white, nervous hand. "I have imagined you every way—pretty, intermediate, charming——"

"And ugly?" with a smile that almost annihilated him.

"No; never that. No one could imagine a positively ugly woman as the author of 'Ruth.'"

"Well, I hope you are not disappointed in your imaginings," she said archly, raising her dark eyes to his.

"On the contrary, I am quite as charmed with the writer as with the writings. Your heroine 'Ruth' is divine. The story is so vivid that I could almost imagine myself one of the characters. I actually blushed for poor Fred!"

"Thank you!" she said softly. "That is one of the prettiest compliments that has been paid my book, and I appreciate it. That, I think, is the keynote of sucess. The stories one generally reads are too far-fetched to appeal to one's sympathies, don't you think? The good of the plot

and general merits are lost entirely in the high-flown style in which the subject is handled. Reading some of our modern stories one can easily imagine that they are reading of the lives of royalty as it existed in the time of Elizabeth, so formal and stilted are the conversations of its characters. What the public wants now is a story that appeals to every-day home life. It is astonishing how capricious the public fancy is! About every three years the whole reading world undergoes a complete change. For one period nothing but historical books succeed. Then follows a silly season, in which the trashiest sort of literature is accepted and hungrily devoured by the reading world. I think their criticisms are governed by the mood they happen to be in when criticising. I cannot see if it is otherwise why some books ever gain such marked popularity over others which are just as good, if not really better, and which fall short of success."

"Won't you dance with me?" Nevarro said, as the orchestra struck up a lively waltz.

"I am sorry," she said, "but I do not waltz."

"Then the next cotillion?" he pleaded.

She bowed her head and he wrote his name on her card.

"You are not dancing?" someone asked beside her. Eloise looked up to see Levare, with that grave, rare smile on his lips.

"No. That is—I haven't danced yet. I cannot say that I fancy dancing so very much."

He regarded her a moment silently.

"You are different from most women," he said. "Mrs. Ballette has left her home and hus-

band to come here to-night to dance with others."

"Do not judge from appearance altogether," she said, looking across the room where Ada was whirling about in the arms of a gay young Lothario, who seemed highly flattered by the fact that the most beautiful woman in the room had deigned to dance with him. "From what I could gather from her conversation, I came to the conclusion that she has come here to-night in order to keep from remaining alone."

Levare looked into her face with a peculiar expression in his dark, magnetic eyes. "So soon?" he thought. "Great heavens! The fickleness of mankind is something shocking in the extreme!"

Earle had stepped back when Serrell came upon the scene—a peculiar, questioning gleam in his eyes. He did not propose to share his partner's conversation with any man. It was quite evident, he thought somewhat savagely, as he stood at a distance watching them, that Levare was badly *epris* already.

"My dear, are you enjoying yourself?" came Mrs. Nevarro's voice, as she passed resplendent in satin and diamonds. "Not dancing?"

"Ah! Mrs. Nevarro," the girl replies, "you see I have the advantage of the others. While they are whirling around in the giddy mazes of the waltz, I am standing here quietly enjoying it all, by looking on, without fear of experiencing the fatigue on the morrow."

"You are wise, my dear," the lady returned, smiling graciously, while Levare observed evidently bored.

Just at that moment Earle advanced.

"I believe this is our dance, Miss Venarez," he said with his usual easy grace, but Eloise could not fail to detect a slight annoyance in his tone—"if you care to dance it."

"Yes, certainly," she answered, laying her white gloved hand upon his sleeve.

The cotillion slowly circled around, forming an endless chain, and showing off the fair debutante's variously tinted costumes effectively. Ever and anon Eloise caught a glimpse of Zida's pretty animated face and red hair. Levare, dancing with Mrs. Ballette, looked across and saw Eloise smiling up at Nevarro. A quick, ungovernable, unaccountable pang of resentment thrilled through him.

"You look tired," Serrell was saying a little later, as he gazed into Eloise's face, which for some reason had grown suddenly pale. "Let us go into the conservatory. The heat of the rooms have fatigued you and the air will do you good."

She took his arm in silence, but with a feeling of gladness at her heart, and they passed out into the conservatory.

The delicious odor of the fragrant jassamine greeted them. Eloise took a seat beside a marble urn. Levare sat down beside her. A sigh of relief escaped the girl's lips. At last she could rest. She did not feel compelled to smile now. The subdued splash of the fountain near at hand had an irresistably soothing effect upon her, and she raised her eyes to her companion's face.

"Now we can talk," he said, turning to her,

and thinking bitterly how much she had changed since he had first known her. He suddenly took her hand.

"I want to tell you what an impression your story has made upon me," he said, with a world of meaning in his dark eyes.

The hand he held trembled slightly. She had often wondered what his opinion of her work would be. Once she had feared that he would not deign to read it.

"I could not tell you in there what I thought of it," he resumed after a moment's silence. "I think you will understand why——"

He paused again.

"It is something to be proud of, and I almost envy you. The critics have been generous in their praise of it, and I think it is destined to fill a long felt want."

Through the open widows the music floated out to them. The soft, subdued lights fell in long slanting rays across the garden. Eloise instinctively raised her eyes to his.

"I'm sure I was never vain enough to hope for anything like the success it has achieved," she said, while her hand still lay submissively in his.

"It is simple in construction," he said, "yet the sentiment is grand—it is sublime! It is deep enough to be intensely interesting without being so much so as to mystify its readers. That's where I fancy most writers make a mistake."

Eloise experienced a thrill of pride as she listened to this young man's candid opinion of her book. Somehow she valued his opinion more than that of anyone else, and often in writing she

felt secretly anxious as to what he would think of it. She knew Serrell Levare to be a man capable of independent thought.

"I hardly dared hope that you would read it," she said with a slight smile.

He regarded her intensely, a dark light shining in his eyes.

"Did you really think so lightly of me, Eloise? Or must it be Miss Venarez from henceforth? Shall it be 'Eloise' as in the old days?"

"Yes," she said softly, a slight tremor in her sweet voice, "as in the old days."

He pressed the hand he held.

"You should have known that I would read it after I found who its author was. I do not forget old friends so easily. Was there any special incident which came under your observation that prompted your portrayal of 'Ruth's' character?"

"None whatever," she answered calmly.

"Your imagination is indeed vivid. 'Ruth' is my ideal of perfect womanhood and if I should ever love it would be a woman like that. Always keep your heroines as pure as she; if you must degrade any of your characters let it be the heroes. Do not degrade them in order to gain public favor—to cater to a passing fancy. You cannot afford to do so. Better no reputation as a writer than a bad one."

Eloise felt the truth of his convictions. Where was another young man of her acquaintance who would speak to her in this vein?

"I fancied," he went on, "that the personality of 'Ruth' reminded me of you."

"No indeed," she laughed. "I am no such

woman as I pictured my heroine, I assure you. I could not be as resigned as she."

Suddenly Levare spoke.

"You used to long for the life you are now entering, how do you think you will enjoy it?"

A shadow passed over her beautiful face. She looked away from him.

"I am disappointed," she said, with a touch of sadness in her clear voice. "It is all so hollow—everything is a pretence. I am beginning to think that real friendship and true hearts exist only in fiction."

He regarded her with a bitter smile on his firm lips.

"I feared as much. You were such a devoted believer in all things good. I feared for you when you should grow to see the world as it is. Society is like the 'apples of Sodom'—enticing to view, but hollow to the core. I hope you may always remain the same, Eloise."

"Yes," she said, apparently in a deep study, "but I grew out of my belief which you refer to as being so devout. I grew out of it long ago. I don't know who to believe in now."

"You know," he went on, while a slight smile plays across his lips—"you know those are not the theories advanced in 'One Woman's Life.' They are different sentiments altogether. You must practice what you preach, Eloise."

"Yes; remind me of my duty, please. I have had a sad life, Serrell—a very sad life; and I have been very rebellious at times; sinfully so. Long ago I suffered much and one whom I loved better than life suffered also, and I grew

very bitter toward the world generally; but I have been taught a lesson, I think. We are never forgotten by heaven, though sometimes we may think so. I thought my lot undeservedly hard when years ago"—her eyes were misty now and she gazed into space—"little Hugh was taken from me. I fought fiercely against Fate, but now I think I can see wherein it was best for me."

She rose and he did likewise, and stood before her. From the rooms a girl's soft laughter floated out to them.

"I need not try to keep anything connected with my past from you," she continued; "you know how we were situated, and what a hard, lonely life was mine, but you don't know all. There was once a time when I prayed for such an existence as this. If I could have had it then I would have enjoyed it all. But now, no matter what happens, I can never be happy. It doesn't seem right that I should enjoy life when my dear dead ones could not——"

For a moment he silently regarded her downcast face—a hard, unreal expression on his determined young face.

"I pray you do not think yourself alone in your sorrow," he said, suddenly, again taking her hand. Sometimes when the world seems so heartless and cold it is a mask assumed to hide deeper feelings—to hide sorrow. We are not always bound to express our feelings, are we? Oftentimes we force a smile to our lips to hide deeper and more bitter emotions; and, Eloise, there are greater sorrows in this world than

death. That is the expected. It is worse to be deceived by one you love."

She looked at him wonderingly.

"There is consolation is knowing that 'every heart knoweth its own bitterness.' Try to think better of the world, Eloise. I think I know what it is to feel alone. My parents died when I was only fourteen, and within a month of each other, and since then I have known no home but the one I have now. I am more desolate than you. You have your brother. I have no one nearer than my uncle. It is bad for a man to feel so alone; it must be horrible for a woman. I try to drown my loneliness in my profession; you must do the same," taking her hand in both his own and pressing it firmly. "Always remember hereafter when you feel lonely and neglected that there is at least one among your acquaintances who feels for you deeply—who has gone through it all himself, and who, if he appears hollow and unfeeling to others, will never be so to you; always remember that."

She took his arm and they passed through the spacious corridors to the ball room.

"We thought you had gone to stay!" Zida said. We've been waiting for you ever so long. Earle has seen that you are here, now I presume he'll begin the Ribbon Cotillion. He saw it in Madrid last year when he was doing Spain."

She crossed the room to Nevarro.

"Yes; we will have it just as soon as this dance is over," he said. "We want it to be last, you know."

Yards of variously colored and brightly hued

ribbons are suspended from the ceiling, to each length is attached a bunch of flowers, and all the ribbons are numbered. The rights to pull are drawn like prizes to a lottery. Of these ribbons one is fastened to a beautiful wreath of white flowers, which, when the ribbon to which it is attached is pulled, falls into the hands of the lucky individual, who has the privilege of crowning anyone he or she may deem King or Queen of the Ball, to whom all are required to render homage and admiration.

Nevarro made his way across the room to the beautiful Mrs. Ballette, who was chatting gaily with Mrs. Nevarro. There was a strange, questioning gleam in his eyes as he approached her. Three months ago this girl had thrown him over to marry Girard Ballette. Nevarro had imagined himself desperately in love with her at the time, and he could not look with indifference on the result of affairs even yet; but we are told that a man usually outgrows such heart wounds as are received before the age of twenty-five, though they seem everlasting at the time. She looked up as he approached with a certain witching raillery in her dark eyes that he did not fail to note. A swift, humiliating emotion swept over him. Did she then feel that she still had him in her power? He felt a stinging desire to rebuke her for the way in which she had treated him, and yet he was far too proud to let her know that he cared. Around his sensitive mouth were tense, drawn lines.

"This is our dance," he says, bending over her, a hard ring in his voice, "if you care to dance it.

If not we will go into the conservatory until the next."

She slipped her hand through his arm and they passed out into the cool flower-scented gardens.

Eloise experienced a vague, restful calm in being able to look into Serrell's grave, deep eyes, and to touch his hand at every turn. She was glad that he was to be her partner throughout the dance. His deep, tender regard—his voice—brought over her a rush of old memories with a keen longing akin to pain. She felt that with him she had something in common; that he took hold on her past. The others she had met were of her old life a thing apart—living creatures moving in a realistic dream.

The music touched Levare's nature with a strange, irresistible longing—a desire for something nobler and better; something his empty heart had always craved, but never felt. He looked down into his companion's eyes questioningly, and firmly pressed her hands as they swung through the dance. The music had stirred Eloise deeply, too. She felt his look sinking into her soul. She passed the length of the room in the promenade with him, and the dance was over. He led her to a seat. As she passed across the room she raised her eyes; they encountered the full regard of Nevarro. He was standing in the entrance way from the garden, with Ada at his side. There was a pained drawn expression on his white face which Eloise never remembered having seen there before. Ada was strangely silent.

* * * * *

"It couldn't have been improved upon, I assure you, Mr. Nevarro," a pale blonde with a lorgnette was saying at the conclusion of the Ribbon Cotillion. "It is quite an original idea; where did you get it?"

The ribbons had been drawn and the magnificent wreath of waxen white blossoms had fallen into the possession of Levare. With a few appropriately spoken words he had knelt at Eloise's feet, and rising, had placed it upon her dark hair. There had been a round of applause—a soft clapping of gloved hands. The music—a wild Spanish mazurka—had suddenly passed into a stirring two-step. The dancers with one accord knelt before the chosen Queen of the Ball, and the dance was declared over.

"'Give, unrestrained, the old emotion,
The bliss that touched the verge of pain,
The strength of Hate, Love's deep devotion."

* * * * *

The next evening there came a decided rat-tat-tat at Earle Nevarro's door. He was sitting beside the window leisurely smoking a cigar.

"Are you there, Earle? May I come in?" came Zida's shrill voice from the outside, while the knob was rattling vigorously.

"Yes; certainly," he answered, striding across the floor and opening the door to admit his small cousin. "When did you get in?"

"Just this moment," said she, sauntering up to the raised window and sitting down in it. "I found that Lillian has gone to the Venarez'. Aunt Mildred is taking her usual afternoon siesta,

and didn't want to be disturbed, and as I didn't want to go right home I searched you up. I say," suddenly, "Lillian is getting marvellously 'fresh' around the Venarez', isn't she?"

Nevarro smiled indulgently.

"Don't let it disturb you; it is not leap year, you know."

"Oh, I'm not jealous a bit if that's what you mean," she retorts quickly.

There is a moment's silence.

"Have you gotten over the dance?" he asked.

"No. I am tired yet. I danced every time, and I had the gayest time imaginable."

"Why didn't you prepare me for it, Zida?" Earle said, suddenly. "Why didn't you tell me that Miss Venarez was one of the prettiest girls I ever saw? She is charming."

"Because I wanted you to find that out yourself. How did I know you would consider her pretty? You have such odd ideas of beauty, anyway. I had no idea you would fancy her style. You rave over professional beauties, and I knew Eloise was a different type. I've never seen a great beauty, so-called, yet that I thought the least bit pretty. They are too classically perfect to be pretty, and I don't fancy perfection."

"So much for lack of taste," he said dryly.

"Do you think her as pretty as Mrs. Ballette?"

An expression of annoyance passed over his face.

"She is not like Mrs. Ballette," he said; "not in the least."

He caressed his mustache a moment in silence,

a slight frown contracting his brow, and then he spoke:

"I lost something last night at the dance—something I didn't think I possessed, and I miss it dreadfully."

Zida's questioning brown eyes met his. "What's the grievance now?"

Nevarro repressed a smile.

"I think it's my heart; or, at least, I miss *something* out of here," touching his breast, significantly.

"You're mistaken," Zida returned, gravely. "you've never had a heart to lose! Perhaps you didn't eat enough dinner?"

Her eyes roamed over the room; then looking up she met his regard, and they both laughed.

The low rumbling of distant thunder reached them.

"It's going to rain," she said. "I'd better go."

CHAPTER VIII.

ZIDA.

"I know a maiden fair to see—
Take care!
She can both false and friendly be,
Beware! Beware!
Trust her not; she is fooling thee!"

The thundery July evening was on the wane; the sickening heat had passed. The thunder rolled and rumbled like fiery chariots on the pavements of the world. Eloise was in the garden. She was thinking of Levare. Some sentence she had just read reminded her of a few words he had uttered a week before at the dance. It had been nearly six years since she had first known him. He had changed very little. He looked more like a man now, and he must be quite twenty-five. Eloise closed her eyes. As in a dream she saw herself back in her home on dismal, obscure South Street. He and Zida were the only true friends she had then—yes, and Ada—and she always looked forward to their visits as a flower looks for sunshine. She recalled that sad evening long ago when his thoughtfulness had brightened her baby brother's life. How she adored him for that!

How we love those who have shown a kindness to some dear one with whose presence we are blessed no more forever! She had the beloved toy still, locked away from sight, with its ribbon bridle, soiled and tied full of knots, and its once beautiful dappled body showing here and there the prints of loving baby fingers. She had never looked at it but once since baby's death, and that was when on the night of the dance she had opened its receptacle and lovingly placed beside it the beautiful wreath of white blossoms.

Some one rang the door bell and a moment later Serrell was admitted. He wended his way into the garden. She did not see him as he walked eagerly down the flower-bordered path toward her. She was sitting on a rustic settee, at the end of the garden, idly pulling to pieces a pink La France rose. She turned her head as he appeared, and their eyes met.

"So you found me?" she said smiling, and making room for him beside her.

"Yes. I preferred finding you to being announced. What a pretty place you have here!"

"Yes; isn't it beautiful?" she said quietly. "These jessamines are lovely, so pure and white and fragrant, and the foliage makes such a charming background. I love them so! They were my mother's favorite flowers, and they are mine. Nothing carries me back to the past like they."

"Give me one, won't you?" he asked.

She reached up to one above her head.

"No; not that please; the one you are wearing. There are others you know."

He was looking at her steadily now.

"Have you been writing much lately? I fancied you looked tired."

She shook her head.

"No; nothing except one or two short stories, and that not lately. I think the warm weather is telling on me. I have an idea of running down to the seashore about the first of August. I want a little change."

"A capital idea," he said. "I wish my duties were not so urgent, and I would go also. The heat of the city right now is terrible. This is the first summer in five years that has found me unable to take a short vacation. Auntie always rented a cottage down on the Island until Zida went off to school four years ago and then she boarded. I heard her say this morning something about going down for a short time. I think she would have taken a cottage for the season, but Zida is so afraid of storms, and they are more violent there than here. She is timid about going in water, too, and I don't think she is very anxious to go. She has an idea that she will have a more enjoyable time here, though I can't imagine why, for society is all there now. A good many went down this morning, and more leave to-morrow. Those who remained until now did so for the purpose of attending the ball. I fancy things are pretty lively down there now."

"Yes," she said, somewhat wearily; "that is one reason I don't want to go. There is no rest there. I want to go where there is absolute quiet."

Levare studied for a moment.

"I think I know where you could find such a place," he said. "Mrs. Nevarro has a fine place down near the seaside. It is a quaint old structure, isolated and extremely picturesque. It is made entirely of gray stone and the moss of nearly two centuries almost cover it. To be exact, it was built in the year 1714, and I suppose is one of the oldest buildings in the State. The date 1714 is shown in white brick over the door. It is a curious old building, almost entirely round and the main room is very large, and all the other rooms open out into it. It is situated just in the edge of a cypress forest, and in the distance one can see the blue ocean. Then there is a high hill to the east—almost a mountain, and vast fields all around. It is twelve miles from any railroad. It was owned by a rich slave owner and remained the property of the family until a few years ago, when the last member died, and Mrs. Van saw it and became fascinated by its old world aspect, and learning that it was for sale, purchased it, along with all its quaint and curious furnishings. Zida has been begging her aunt to bring a few pieces to her town house here—she and Miss Lillian—but Mrs. Nevarro will not consent to have a thing removed. She has been offered incredible sums by relic hunters for a single piece, but has refused. They have an old Scotchman and his wife living there to look after everything. They have not summered there since Miss Lillian went off to school. Nevarro and I went down one winter about three years ago. He has a kennel of as fine hounds as I ever saw, and several fine horses, and a regular armory. He goes on a big

deer hunt every winter. He is *one* man who enjoys life."

There was a wistful expression in his dark eyes as he ceased speaking.

"Yes," Eloise said, "and yet he seems very generous."

Levare cleared his throat.

"Generous to a fault. He's a number one good fellow, is Nevarro."

* * * * *

Up the broad granite steps of the Venarez residence ran a second figure; a slim, girlish form clad in white from head to foot. A jaunty white cap rested on the red boyish curls; a white blazer flared open showing the fluffy front of white silk, in which the pale, mysterious gems of the moonstone shimmered softly. Around the slender waist was a white kid belt, and in her white gloved hand she carried a dainty white beruffled parasol, which, in its gauzy airiness, resembled nothing so much as a mammoth hollyhock.

She paused before the door and violently pulled the bell. There was no answer to the summons, and a moment later a well-known and thoroughly masculine voice rang through the house.

"Martha! Where in the dickens *is* the girl?"

But "the girl" was evidently enjoying a snooze, for there was no reply; and Venarez, pulling himself together, rose, and walking slowly across the hall, opened the door to greet the smiling face of Zida.

"Hello, there!" she said, as he allowed her to

pass. "What's the matter with you? Been asleep?"

"Yes," answered he, as she drops inertly into a low fauteuil, and pulling off her small cap, proceeds to fan herself. "Yes, for the last blessed three hours."

Zida looked at him and laughed.

"Well, it's a pity you can't sleep enough at night; evil conscience, I suppose."

"That's it," Jack said, running his fingers through his thick blonde hair; "you know how it is yourself."

"Yes; you have my sympathy."

"Where is Eloise?"

"Can't say, I'm sure. Haven't seen her since dinner. Gone out I suppose."

"Isn't it dreadfully warm?" the young lady presently said. "The thermometer has been standing 100 in the shade for four successive days."

"Let me get you a better fan," he says, rising, "and excuse me for not doing so sooner."

"No, no," she answered quickly, "this is all right."

She accepted the fan, however, with a quick little bow.

In a moment she left her seat and going across to the mantel she toyed with a small piece of bric-a-brac in a maner altogether restless. Jack watched the petite figure admiringly, with something of the same relish with which he would admire a blooded filly. He advanced to where she stood. She turned from the mantel and held out a small hand to him.

"Have you nothing to smoke, Jack? Give me a cigarette, will you? I haven't had a pull at one in a week. The last time I was smoking papa came very near catching me, and there would have been 'a hot time,' and don't you forget it. I had to throw my cigarette behind a table, and as it was the last one I had, and I didn't know where the next one was coming from, I was cross all day. I have to be so shy about buying them."

"So you've gone at it at last?" Jack says, holding out to her a package of cigarettes. "Do you really like it?"

Zida slowly drew one from the package and deliberately dampened the ends between her red lips.

"Sure. Why should I indulge if I do not enjoy them? Keep it dark, will you? Nobody knows of this new acquisition to my list of enumerable vices except Earle and Lillian, and now yourself—not even Serrell. I'd as soon announce the fact through the locals of '*The State*' as to let him know it. He'd be so shocked he'd tell papa and mama, and then I guess I'd be sent to a nunnery, there to remain indefinitely. Serrell's got no use for up-to-date girls; he likes the old sort best. Give me a light, will you?"

Jack bent forward to touch the lighted end of his cigarette to hers.

"There!" she said, standing erect and puffing a small gust of blue smoke to the ceiling; "that's all right. Thank you!"

Venarez watched her with a strange light in his blue eyes. Well, she was peculiar. She was not a back number—he had not met her ilk outside

of—and yet, hang it all! He found it decidedly pleasant and interesting to be with her.

"Are you going to the matinee tomorrow afternoon?" he asked.

She flicked the ashes from the end of her small "smoker" with the air of a veteran, while she puffed away thoughtfully with half closed eyes.

"Why? Are you?"

"If you will go with me," he replied very low.

"All right," she answered, smiling. "I'll go, certainly. Have you a fly plaster of some kind that I may stick to the back of my head to help me smoke this thing you've given me? I'm completely out of breath! What have you done to it? Confound it!"

The young man laughed.

"Not a thing, I assure you."

"If this is the brand you give to your friends I do not wonder that your conscience will not allow you no rest at night," she went on, throwing the stump into the grate. "I'm exhausted. Doubt if I'll have strength to reach home. Ring for an ambulance, will you?" with a naughty laugh.

She consulted her watch.

"I must go; it's six o'clock. Tell Eloise I've been here. You needn't tell her how long I stayed, though."

She flounced out of the room.

Jack followed in her wake.

"Did you ride?" he asked as they reached the door.

"Yes. I came on my wheel."

"Then if you don't mind," he said, reaching for his cap, "I'll ride home with you."

* * * * *

A few days later it happened that Zida, Serrell, Earle and Miss Lillian were dining with our friend Eloise. They were not especially invited; they just happened in. Eloise, in her habitual soft white, sat at the head of the table. Zida and Jack sat *vis-a-vis,* and she was talking in her inexhaustible manner about the matinee they had attended a few days before. Jack tossed off a glass of champagne.

"Yes," she said, "the dancing was superb. Zillah was at her best. The songs were immense. Trust a variety show like that for new dances and catchy airs."

"Yes," Zida said, "I've got the little jig down fine," with a sidewise glance at Serrell, who looked across at her with a peculiar smile, half repressed. He set his glass down and looked up at Eloise. She nodded. "It's only Zida," she said, smiling indulgently. "She is to be excused, you know."

"I want to be an actress myself," Zida rattled on. "If papa and mama were to wink out I'd go on the stage so quick it would make your head swim. I would like to be in a play like 'Zillah,' one of the variety kind, you know."

"Suppose you couldn't get on?" interposed Earle. "It is not always a pretty face that meets with success. You must have talent to succeed as an actress."

"It's just luck," Miss Lillian ventured. "It's not a pretty face, or talent either, that is always

accepted. If your lucky star is in the ascendant you will be accepted; if not, you will be rejected."

"Yes," Zida said, smiling approval at her blonde cousin; "that's just it. Look at the success 'Zillah' has met with. She is not at all pretty, if she does appear so on the stage, and her voice is like a crow's; and yet if popular report is to be credited her yearly salary exceeds that of the President. It is just that nameless something about them that takes."

"I wouldn't be an actress, I think," Miss Lillian said slowly. "I do not fancy the lives they lead. If I should be though, I'd want to fill such places as did Sarah Bernhardt and Ellen Terry, or Mary Anderson. No inferior part for me."

Zida flushed up a bit.

"I wouldn't have such parts!" she said, a little hotly. "We see too much tragedy in real life to wish to see it in the play. Most people's aversion to stage life and stage people is backed up by prejudice. They envy their popularity. I don't care what is said against them. They enjoy life, and that is a great item. So far as being our inferiors socially, they don't care for that; they move in a gay world of their own, and a large majority of them spring from the best families. Some of the nobility of Europe are on the stage. What does it profit us to sit up on our own dignity and 'blood' and refer to such people in a condescending way, when they have more money, more fun, and receive more homage in one night than we receive in our lives?"

"It is the hardest life one can lead," Earle said. "They deserve all they get out of it."

"Nevertheless, they enjoy themselves," Zida said. "They are well paid and money talks."

Eloise looks at her steadily.

"That's true," said she, "without it we are usually in need of friends; with it, no matter how we come into that possession, we can't stir for them."

Zida nodded approvingly.

"That's just it. You know how it is yourself, Eloise, and you're truthful enough to own it."

"Serrell tells me you are thinking of running down to the seashore now soon, Eloise," said Lillian, suddenly.

"Yes."

Zida was instantly all attention.

"Really, Eloise?"

"Positively."

"Well, do let *me* go too, won't you?"

"Certainly. I will be delighted to have you, and you, too, Lillian."

"That's a good idea," Earle said. "Why not have the whole crowd go?"

"I'm sure I do not object. I was only speaking for myself," returned Eloise.

"Yes, let's all go," Jack put in. "You can get off for a few days, can't you, Levare?"

"I don't know," he answered reflectively. "I should *like* to."

"Yes, of course he can," Nevarro said positively, bent on the trip in view. "There's no use in a man's killing himself because he can."

Serrell laughed. "No; I believe that is your creed, Nevarro. I think I can get off possibly."

"Who's to chaperone the girls?" Jack asked.

"Mother and auntie will go, I know," Nevarro said. "I'm sure they will, if only to oblige us."

"Let's see," said Jack reflectively, "this is Thursday. We might go next Thursday or Friday. That will give the girls time to get ready. We don't need any preparations. That is all characteristic of women. That is why all steamboats and cars are referred to as 'she,' they say—'the rigging costs more than the hull.' All on the outside, and all for show."

"It makes me think of what I heard my father say once," Earle took it up. "He said it used to be common before the war, when some people were expecting company, to call up all the little darkies and have them grease their faces all over, and then have them play in the front yard when the company came; all the time the poor little devils were so hungry they could see spirits."

Jack pushed his ice-cream saucer from him.

"They'd never have played that old gag on me," he said, as they all rise and go into the drawing-room. "I would have swiped that grease off in one round. It couldn't taunt me with its smell when I was hungry. That is one of the might-have-beens that I would not have suffered."

There was a delightfully cool breeze stirring now; it blew into the room and against the lace curtains, which balanced coquettishly back and forth, fluttering like flags in a gale.

"This is glorious!" Jack said, sinking down on

a rich divan. Zida sat down beside him, and Earle walked across to a dainty easel and regarded the painting before him with the eye of a connoisseur. Eloise stood beside him. Levare and Lillian were seated in one of the long windows.

"Will you sing something?" Earle asked. "Zida says you sing beautifully."

"Zida is a great flatterer," Eloise answered. "I play very little."

"I know," he persisted; "but you sing, and please sing something for me, won't you?"

Thus touchingly appealed to the girl advanced toward the piano, and taking her seat, began an old love song, one she had known all her life, and one she used to sing sometimes in the dear, dead days on South Street. Levare listened intently. It carried him back many years. There was an intense, absorbed expression on his grave, young face as he watched her profile—calm, tender, hopeful—so distinctly seen from his present post of observation. Nevarro was leaning on the piano—his very soul in his eyes as he watched her. A quick, unwarrantable, ungovernable jealousy swept over Levare's heart. Was Nevarro feeling like that toward her already? Impossible! And yet there was no mistaking that look; he had regarded her that way himself. We are told that first love is the sweetest; and Earle had once loved very dearly, with that deep confiding trust that is peculiar to youth—and had been rejected. He had grown rather cynical after that, and he, usually so cold and proud had become somewhat rash and reckless. When some months before, Ada Dalton, his boyhood's sweetheart, who had

for years encouraged and shown him preference, had suddenly thrown him over to marry Girard Ballette, he believed himself undone. The humiliation which he felt at the time was intolerable. He knew that the way she had treated him would be town talk, for with the indiscretion of youth he had not sought to conceal his absorbing passion for her. He was deeply, bitterly hurt, but with the stubborn pride which was part of him he tried to hide his chagrin at the risk of his future well-being, and in this mood he had proposed to Zida. After his experience with the beautiful Mrs. Ballette he lost faith in women generally, as such cases are wont to do, and in his then present state of mind he found relief in his capricious cousin's society. She helped to confirm his opinion, already biased, toward her sex. Until recently she had been totally impartial in her likes and dislikes to all the young men of her acquaintance. Now, however, it seemed quite probable that there was to be a decided preference shown our friend Jack. Eloise had finished singing. She rose from the piano, and at Nevarro's request they all went into the garden. Levare and Lillian followed, but at the last moment Jack and Zida decided to remain behind. When the others were gone Zida crossed over to the piano and began playing the gay little air she had learned at the play, "Zillah," a week before. She rattled it off at a lively rate, keeping time with one small foot. Jack stood beside her. She ended with a little flourish, and, rising, pirouetted lightly around the room, whistling all the while. She made a tambourine of her small left hand which she struck in

exact imitation of that instrument with her other, performing the while a wild little dance she had learned from "Zillah," which, however, had a goodly amount of high kicking in it. She got deeper and deeper into its mystic intricacies; her brown eyes were shining like stars—her cheeks were flushed, a bright, red spot burned on either —her red lips parted in a smile. Jack watched her, his chin resting on his breast, an amused light in his blue eyes, a broad smile on his lips.

Zida had caught her white skirt up in her left hand, displaying to Venarez' somewhat astonished gaze a pair of delicately rounded and perfectly shaped ankles. He opened his eyes a little wider, but she heeded it not; her right hand was pressed against the back of her curly, red head; she gazed upward, and kicked through the dance in utter abandon, and in exact imitation of "Zillah." Venarez stood it as long as he could, and suddenly snapping his fingers, he advanced to meet her. He caught her left hand in his right, and they circled around in a manner exactly similar to "Zillah" and her quondam paramour. Jack's hand suddenly fell to her waist—he drew her to him a little nearer. * * * They paused. He looked down into her face for quite a moment without speaking. She glanced up into his eyes and smiled.

"Zida," he said, pressing the hand he held in his own, "it was very pretty—the dance. Would you have danced it for any other man except me?"

He looked strangely grave as he asked it. Zida

twisted herself from out his grasp with a gay, little laugh.

"Why certainly!" she answered; "you are not so conceited as all *that,* I hope?"

He did not smile, however.

"I should not like to think you would," he said very gravely.

* * * * *

The next Thursday morning a very merry party boarded the ten o'clock train for the "City by the Sea." There was Mrs. Nevarro and Mrs. Van Worth; then Levare and Miss Lillian, looking as cold and haughty as usual. Earle and Eloise came next, while Jack and Zida "brought up the rear." The girls were chatting as gay as young sparrows, the men were doing their best to appear amiable—the chaperones as pleasantly sedate as is becoming in matrons of their age and position. Nevarro and Miss Venarez occupied the same seat though poor Serrell inwardly swore at the fact. It seemed that Eloise was very much satisfied with the present state of affairs, he thought. Of course, this was a wrong impression, but it succeeded in making him decidedly miserable. He did not know the woman he had to deal with. Her pride was so essentially a part of her that she would have preferred death just then rather than let him know the exact state of her feelings toward him. He and Miss Lillian sat opposite the others. Jack and Zida behind them.

"What time will we reach the city?" Lillian asked, as they steam along at the rate of fifty miles an hour.

Levare consulted his watch.

"We are due there at one o'clock."

"Three hours," Eloise said, settling herself comfortably back on her seat, while Nevarro cut the leaves of a magazine. He was experiencing new and varied emotions sitting here beside this girl whom he had known so short a time, but had, nevertheless, taught him that all women were not the shallow, fickle creatures he had deemed them.

It was very well that some new influence had entered the young man's life right at this eventful epoch of his existence, for (like most young men, who, upon meeting their first great disappointment) he had been steadily drifting downward. For, while a woman dies of a broken heart, or enters a convent as a solace for disappointed hopes, or unreciprocated affection, a man rushes blindly into business, blows his brains out, or goes to the bad altogether.

* * *

The next morning the girls were up early, they all being fired with the desire to see the sun rise, apparently out of the waves. Eloise, after hastily donning a dressing gown, had gone over to the window, and throwing open the blinds she cried rapturously:

"Oh! Do come and see, girls! Isn't it glorious?"

"Yes, yes!" Zida said, gazing before her. "Let's dress and have breakfast and go out at once."

She turned and hastily proceeded to make her toilet, while Eloise and Lillian sat still in the

window, gazing in rapt admiration at the scene before them.

"Don't be too sentimental, girls," came Zida's sharp voice from the other end of the room, "there's plenty of time for that afterwards. Do hurry and dress, and let's go out on the veranda before the boys get down."

"There! Let *me* do your hair for you, Lillian," she said, crossing over to where that young lady is doing her best to fix her flaxen locks becomingly (without any degree of success, however) and taking the brush out of her hands.

"Let me braid it for you, and then I'll fix it up in the style that is so becoming to your special type of beauty, and which Serrell admires so much."

Miss Lillian sat down submissively. She did not much fancy the style in which her small cousin persisted in "doing" her blonde tresses; but, then, she did not know until just now that Serrell fancied it, and—that made a difference.

Why did those words go to Eloise's heart? She had fancied that Serrell was paying a little more attention than mere etiquette demanded to Miss Lillian lately, and it did really seem so. The girl felt for the moment inexpressibly lonely and forsaken. She was a little disappointed, and her idol had taken a few downward steps.

"Eloise has put hers up as usual," said Zida, putting the last pin in Lillian's hair. "Why do you wear white so much, Eloise? I can never think of you any other way; and why is your hair so thick up next your head, and so thin at the ends?"

L OF C.

"Don't know, dear," Eloise answers, calmly, "unless it is because it was cut not so very long ago."

"Cut?" Zida echoes, in surprise. "Why, when did you? and why? Did you have fever? I thought it used to be long and thick all the way."

"Yes," Eloise said sadly; her eyes were fixed in a dreamy expression on the floor. She had never told Zida of the sacrifice she had made in her last extremity in the long ago. There are some things one likes to keep to one's self.

"Come!" said Zida, taking her friend's hand, and looking up into her face with a questioning look and smile. She had noted the momentary expression of sadness on the other's face, and her tender little heart had gone out to her friend at once. She did not know the cause of Eloise's abstraction, but she knew what a wretched poverty-stricken existence she had led before fortune had favored her. "Come, let us go down. There is the gong for breakfast now."

The ladies had breakfasted when the men went down, and Serrell ate his in silence, and very hurriedly, for he had caught a glimpse of Eloise's white dress out on the veranda. He had been unavoidably thrown in Lillian's society so much of late that he was somewhat afraid this other girl would think he chose that young lady's society in preference to her own. The thought made him ill at ease, for he was honest enough to admit to himself that he loved this fair, pure girl, with her dark hair and thoughtful blue eyes. He had never loved anyone but her, and

bade fair to love her and her alone to the end. He hastily swallowed his coffee, and pushing back his chair, arose from the table.

"Help yourselves, boys," he said, "as for me I've finished and am going out on the piazza."

"Ah?" grunted Jack. "What's your hurry, old man?"

Nevarro's face colored, but he was silent. It was quite evident that someone else liked Eloise as well as Levare.

"What are you doing?" Serrell asked, pausing at the door.

"Ah! Good morning," she said, turning now with a smile, while a faint telltale flush overspread her fair face. "You see we are ahead of you."

"Yes," he answered, advancing to where she stood. "Let's sit down. I want to talk to you."

"Do you think I have time?" she asked, taking the seat indicated and looking up into his face archly.

He consulted his watch.

"Yes; we have plenty of time. It will be ten when the morning boat leaves. It is not yet nine," he said, replacing his watch and glancing away from her over the blue waves before them. She fancied his face looked tired and haggard.

"Have you been working very hard of late, Mr. Levare?" she asked, regarding him sympathetically. "You are rather pale, are you not?"

Then he looked at her curiously.

"Why 'Mr. Levare?'" he asked quizzically, with just the shadow of a smile.

She colored slightly. To be sure she *had* always called him Serrell. Why not now? Somehow he had changed so wonderfully within the last five years. He was not Serrell, the boy, now, whom she had known so long ago. Now he had an imposing "Hon." before his name.

"Excuse me," she stammered, confusedly. "I'll take it back."

He smiled. "Please never call me 'Mr.' again. I hear so much of that now it is quite a relief to be addressed informally, and," suddenly, "unless you specially request it, I shall not call you 'Miss.'"

"No, indeed," she replied, readily. "I am quite as averse to that as you could be to the other."

"Then," he said, "you are quite willing that we should lay aside all formality and be as in the past?"

"Yes, yes," dreamily, "as in the past."

The blue waves gently lapped the beach. Two small pleasure boats skimmed lightly as swans over the water. Suddenly Eloise rose.

"I must go now. It will be quite time for us to leave by the time we are ready. I must look the girls up. Haven't seen them since breakfast."

Serrell stood up, too.

"You are in a great hurry to be off. I—I have not been with you ten minutes," he stammered, trying to say something interesting, hoping thus to detain her, and failing miserably. "Could you not give me a few moments more of your society alone?"

"Not just yet," she answered, feeling a

wicked little thrill of satisfaction in having it within her power to tantalize him a wee bit. But it cost her an effort, be it known; for she would have enjoyed those few moments alone, for which he pleaded, quite as much as he, had not her stubborn pride interfered; and every time her heart melted toward him Lillian's face rose before her and she hardened again.

"Good-bye!" she called back, as she ran lightly down the hall and up the stairs, singing as she went. A peculiar sensation took possession of Levare—a feeling that made his heart beat more quickly, and his eyes grew tender. Yes; that must be it. He admitted to himself that he loved this girl—it must be love, since it was bliss indescribable to be with her; and he had never felt that way before. He congratulated himself upon his excellent taste, and drawing a cigar from his pocket, lighted it, and thrusting his hands into his pockets he leaned against a column and lazily watched the rings of blue smoke curl upward. Far upstairs he could hear Zida's shrill, little laugh, and the occasional, subdued conversation of the boys in another room, sounding like the hum of bees, and ever and anon Jack's characteristic roar. Across the water the dull never ceasing noise of the city reached him, and before him there loomed the tall spire of grand old St. Michael's. They were going to remain there until after Sunday. He would ask Eloise to go there to divine services with him. She loved history; she could enjoy it, knowing its sacred traditions. If he could arrange all that—and then take her for a drive afterward, all might be well.

Then his thoughts reverted to Earle. He had acted a little suspiciously of late, as though he might prove a possible rival, and dwelling a little on this thought he realized that jealousy would be bitter in proportion as this first love was blissful. The shrill whistle of a nearby boat broke his reverie, and flinging his cigar from him, he walked into the room. Just at this moment there was an unusual commotion at the head of the stairs, and Zida, in all the glory of a white duck outing suit, sailed downstairs, talking at the top of her voice. In her wake Eloise and Lillian, the latter attired in a style similar to Zida, and Eloise in a pale blue sailor suit of pique, and both Levare and Nevarro, who came out a moment later, decided that they had never seen her look half so charming.

"We'll just make it," Jack said, as he stepped up beside Zida, looking as handsome as a god in his suit of immaculate flannels.

"Yes," Zida put in, all in a flurry. "I heard the whistle just a moment ago. I wouldn't be left for the world."

All our party except Eloise and Serrell went over on the upper deck; but they preferring to be a little to themselves decided on the lower, and sat just as near the water's edge as possible.

"How refreshing it is after the dust and heat of the city," Eloise said, as the foamy spray dashed itself over them in a cooling cascade. "I believe I'll remain until October. I can't endure the idea of going home so soon. What an inspiration it would be to me when writing!"

"Have you no pity for the rest of us?" Ser-

rell asked, fearing lest she might decide to stay so long.

"Heaven knows it is monotonous enough at best——" he broke off.

A change passed over his face.

"You had better sit a little farther back," he said solicitously; "you will be quite wet; and don't look down at the water constantly; as you are not accustomed to it I'm afraid it will make you dizzy."

She laughed. "I see you think I'm a very poor sailor; but I'll prove to you that such is not the case. I wish I could go on and on until I reached Europe."

"You'd never reach there, then," he said, "for your boat would be upset before you were out into the sea."

"I'd rather travel than to do anything," she said, gazing far out across the current where the ocean and rivers met. The smoke of a north-bound steamer was just fading from view. "I mean to, too, some day when I feel that I am able to afford it."

"Yes, so do I," he said, his eyes following hers; "but if there is anything that *does* require coin and plenty of it, it is globe-trotting. It swallows it up like anything." He turns to her suddenly. "Wait until you marry, Eloise, and then you can take a tour of Europe. It would be better than going alone."

With an effort she turned her eyes from his. "Please do not talk to me of marrying," she said; and in her voice there was a ring of disappointment which he did not quite understand.

"I don't think I shall ever marry. I have another object in life. All people marry. I want to do something else—something better. Getting married is not the chief end of woman if you men *do* think so."

Levare was puzzled.

"Why, Eloise," he said at last, "what has come over you? You are talking like a sour old maid. Have you met with any great disappointment?"

"Yes," she answered mysteriously, "I have met a good many."

Lillian was to blame again. For a moment Levare was silent, while conflicting emotions surged over him. Did she, or had she loved in vain? The thought was torture. If so, who? He could think of no one but Earle, and he felt sure disappointment was not hers if he was the favored one. He was instantly on his mettle.

"I see. You want to achieve something uncommon. You are wooing fame. Well, it might be the most satisfying in the end."

"You are pleased to be cynical, Serrell," she answered. "I do not want to be called eccentric, or do anything that will bring me notoriety, but I mean to devote my life to my writing—no; not to the writing of such books as 'One Woman's Life,'" smiling, "but to deeper work than that. We must all have a start, you know, and I am going to beat that in my next. The proceeds of my books will go mostly to relieve suffering humanity. If in the future I have the success I have had in the past year—that is, with my last book, I can be independently rich

if I so desire; but I do not crave wealth. It is not always the richest people who are the happiest; indeed, it is more often the reverse. I mean to help and encourage people who do not thrust themselves upon public charity, but who toil on and on from year to year on a pittance that barely serves to sustain life. People who have talent and no way of bringing it out will demand a great share of my money. There are quite as many in the usual walks of life striving to maintain themselves and families, deserving our assistance, as there are to be found in charitable institutions. I want to live a good life, Serrell. This old world is so hard hearted and cruel to the unfortunate. I want to be a help."

Levare drew his chair nearer hers.

"Are you sure, Eloise" he asked gravely, "that there is no selfish motive in your wanting to act philanthropist? Is it because you really do desire to alleviate humanity's woes for love and sympathy's sake, and not to gain popularity and public favor? Mind, I do not doubt you at all; for it takes just such pure, good little women as you to show us that love is akin to Heaven. But you know, dear, as well as I, that it is so seldom any other way."

"Yes, Serrell," she said very earnestly, "but believe me when I say that could I do so, I would never have any of my charitable deeds recorded. It seems to me that when they are, it is a kind of reward offered us, such as an indulgent parent would offer a child. To see your name in the papers! *Pshaw!* I try to be

above that. It is nothing to gain public favor. Do you remember those lines of De Manrique's?

'A life of honor and of worth
Has no eternity on earth,—
'Tis but a name?' "

"Yes," he said, slowly. "You are a good girl, Eloise; if you will allow me to speak so plainly, and a very uncommon one. Permit me to say that the influence of such a woman is destined to accomplish incalculable good. I must certainly acknowledge the superiority of your nature over my own. I, on the other hand, have a great care as to what will be thought and said of me. A man in my position usually has. I would certainly like to be thought famous in my profession. I cannot endure to think that after I am gone my name will be forgotten. Such sordid natures as mine can soar no higher."

"We are very different then," the girl said, drawing on her white chamois glove. "After death I care not what becomes of my body or my name. Let them rest forgotten. Give me my portion of life and enjoyment here upon earth, and do not stint me of that in order to erect a costly marble shaft over my dust when I cannot appreciate it."

"Well, what's the matter, you two?" Earle asks, coming upon the scene at this time. "Been talking of the past?"

"No," she answered; "we have been talking of the future."

Nevarro moved his stool near hers.

"Do you find that so monotonous? Judging from your expressions the theme of your conversation must have been anything but a lively one."

"Yes; sometimes I find it dreadfully so."

He regarded her a moment silently.

"Do you know, Miss Venarez, that we are all more or less discontented creatures? You will find no one perfectly satisfied."

"Yes," she said, after a moment, gazing dreamily ahead of her; "that is true, I'll admit, but you are an exception surely? You are quite content with your lot, are you not?"

"You see you do not know," he said, in an utterly indescribable voice, and looking away from her.

"That is why we so often misjudge others; we can see no deeper than the surface. You think that I ought to be happy—perhaps I should; I have much for which to be thankful; but being human I naturally long for a few things which I can never hope to possess."

CHAPTER IX.

A VISIT TO THE SEA.

"Brilliant hopes, all woven in gorgeous tissues,
Flaunting gaily in the golden light;
Large desires with most uncertain issues,
Tender wishes, blossoming at night."

—*Selected.*

Our friends passed near the historic Forts Sumter and Moultrie; and Zida, strangely enough, appeared interested.

"Well, Eloise," she said, "this alone is worth the price of the trip. There is where Jasper replaced the flag during the thickest of the fray. He is one of my heroes. Is he not one of yours?"

"Yes," she said. Please do not talk to me, Zida. There is a feeling too deep for words. I always feel it when I am near such places. I want to think."

Earle was repeating:

"'It was there that Jasper fell
'Neath that bright Autumnal sky;
And has a stone been reared to tell
Where he lay down to die.'"

"That's just it," put in Jack. "After all his heroic deeds the people of this generation hardly know of him. So many brave lives have been sacrificed that we might enjoy liberty."

"That quality is about exhausted," Lillian said, smiling up at Serrell.

"If there should come a war I'm afraid we would find fighting rather scarce."

"No," Levare replied thoughtfully; "I believe in the old saying, that 'there are just as good fish in the sea as were ever caught.' It would be impossible for such noble men to beget such worthless offspring, and I believe that should occasion demand it, we would have just as gallant volunteers to rally around the old flag as there were a hundred years ago."

They secured bathing suits, and set out for the waves. Zida could find no suit to fit except a flaming red, and she made a gay speck among the bathers on the shore. After she had seen two or three great waves break and recede, much to the girl's chagrin, she signified her intention of going back. She didn't believe she wanted to go in after all.

"What's that?" asked Mr. Jack, coming up at this moment, and seemingly not at all abashed at the shocking amount of legs which his scant bathing suit displayed.

"Zida says she is not going in," Miss Lillian said in an aggrieved tone.

"Not going in, eh? Well, we'll see about that," he said, taking one of Zida's small hands as he sees another wave coming. "Take her hand, Miss Lillian."

"Lillian? Jack? Oh, what *are* you going to do? Throw me in?"

"Not a bit of it," he said, gently pressing the hand he held. "We are going to initiate you in the pleasures to be had in old ocean, and take the best possible care of you. Now make up your mind to take it easy; for if you don't go in quietly I'll pick you up and carry you in. Come along."

The frightened girl looked up into the handsome face appealingly, but saw no mercy depicted there.

"Here she goes!"

And suiting the action to the word, he and Lillian with poor, frightened Zida, tumbled in.

"Oh, Jack!" she implored, as she saw another wave coming higher than the first, "*do* let me run?"

But Jack took a firmer grasp on the hand he held.

"Keep your mouth closed!" he shouted, and they disappeared beneath the wave; only to come up a few moments later; and poor Zida, who had forgotten herself, and who had screamed to Jack to save her just as the wave broke over them, was coughing and choking terribly.

"I'll never speak to you again, Jack Venarez, never while I live!" she said. "To think you would drag a poor girl who can't swim a stroke into such a place as that! Oh, I'll never speak to you again—never!"

"That will be death itself," Jack was heard to murmur; "but my dear Zida, are you not

aware that you are speaking to me now? He grew suddenly grave. "I want you to enjoy yourself, Zida," he said.

"And do you call it enjoying myself to come two hundred miles to be strangled to death?" she flashes back. "I'll die!" tragically, "before I'll go in there again."

"When you get over your fright, Zida, you will thank me for having given you a nice time, and you will get over it the very next time I take you in!"

Zida cooled down a bit, and he went on:

"I wonder if you would have it said that Lillian and Eloise were braver than you? Why I thought you were brave. Now let's go again," he said. "Why look yonder at Eloise, will you?" suddenly. And Zida follows his gaze and finally sees Eloise at the other side, making frantic efforts to swim.

"By Jove!" cries Jack. "That old girl can do anything!"

Lillian was now with Levare, and Zida and Jack were left alone. The next time they were washed ashore she was clinging to his arm utterly and hopelessly, and Jack muttered:

"Blessed be all waves from henceforth and forevermore. Amen."

"Well," Eloise said triumphantly, on her way homeward, "I learned to swim."

"Really?" Miss Lillian drawled. "I didn't."

"Well, I learned from bitter experience to keep my mouth closed," Zida said.

The evening passed quickly. The salt breeze had risen and blew into the long, open piazza.

The young people had strolled out upon the beach. Miss Lillian and Jack were together for a wonder, and she seemed quite interested. She was beginning to tolerate the outspoken young man, and had it not been for Serrell she might have liked him pretty well. Zida and Earle sat down on the deep white sand near the water's edge, and she was idly running her fingers through it. She was strangely taciturn this evening, and Earle, so accustomed to her incessant chatter, watched her in silence, marveling greatly.

"A penny for your thoughts, dear," he said, after the silence had grown oppressive.

"Mine?" she asked, with a faint smile. "They are not worth it." She lapsed into silence again; and then said suddenly:

"Do you remember the compact we entered into not so very long ago, Earle?"

He looked into her face thoughtfully a moment.

"Do you mean the one we made about marrying each other?"

"Yes; just that," in a very low tone. "I have grown acquainted with my heart already, and I find it isn't yours, Earle."

"No?" he said very tenderly, and taking her hand. "Well, little girl, in that case I suppose I shall have to give you back your freedom. Who is the lucky rascal? I am very sorry."

She gave him a searching, mischievous glance.

"That isn't the truth, Earle Nevarro," she

said. "You are just as anxious to be free as *I* am, and you know it."

Perhaps he was, but Nevarro was too gallant to own it.

Farther on down the beach Eloise and Serrell were sitting. A pale moon was rising apparently out of the sea before them. The monotonous lapping of the waves broke the serene stillness. Serrell was lying on the sand at her feet, his elbow propped on the sand and his head resting on the hand. The soft, fringe-like curls blew coquettishly around Eloise's fair face.

"Do you know," she said, suddenly, "the sea makes me think of Tennyson's 'Break, Break, Break?' I believe I know how he felt when he was inspired to write that. There is something so grand, so majestic about the ocean that it makes me sad. The sea and stars alone are a convincing proof of a Creator. Do you feel that way, too, Serrell?"

"Yes, to a certain degree. We men cannot appreciate the beauties of nature like you women can. A woman's soul is more responsive to good."

A great reverence for this pure girl before him had sprung up within his heart; a longing to possess her—to be sure of her. Yes; he was in doubt no longer; he loved her with all his heart. Life without her would be too barren and desolate a thing to imagine.

"I wonder why Ada Ballette did not come down this summer?" asked Eloise, suddenly. "Do you know I believe she is disappointed in life? She used to enjoy coming so much."

"I am not surprised," he said at length. "Nevarro wanted to marry the girl, and I used to think she loved him, but somehow she took the other. Earle was much the best catch. I guess she found that at the last moment she loved Ballette better, tho' he had nothing but his salary. I have an idea that she would have been far happier with Nevarro. He isn't over it yet, for she *did* encourage and lead him on. I know that; and then cast him off. I think that is one of the greatest sins a woman can commit, or a man either. You women have great influence over men, Eloise," he said, "you should be careful how you wield it. It is not necessary to ask you never to be guilty of such an act—such women as you never are."

"Monday," she said, somewhat sadly, "we leave here for the dust of the city again. I am sorry to leave. I love the sea, and I'm going to live by it some day."

"Yes," he said, a faint smile playing about his mouth; "some day when you are no longer Eloise Venarez, I will visit you in your home by the sea."

"If you know me always," returned she, "I will still be the same. I never expect to change my name. I am married to my work."

He regarded her intently.

"And do you think, Eloise," he returned, "that it would interfere with your bright prospects to possess the love of a good man?"

"No, I think not," decidedly; "but I think it would interfere with them greatly if I should love a good man. I have told you, Serrell, that I am

too skeptical to ever allow myself to love any man. My ideal is too high. I could not calmly accept the universal lot of women. Men are seldom after marriage what they appear beforehand, and disappointment in that direction would kill me. No; my mind is quite made up. I love the society of men too well to marry, for that is the surest way to be deprived of it. One's husband soon becomes such in deed as well as truth, and then he finds amusement elsewhere, and then his wife is compelled to do without his society and that of other men also. No, thank you, I have decided to bide as I am, and that to be an old maid is my portion. There are worse evils than to remain single. I'll accept such a lot gladly, for, as Jack says, 'I much prefer single blessedness to double cussedness.' I have seen too much of our modern marriages to ever take upon my shoulders the responsibilities of wifehood."

Serrell watched her curiously.

"You may say that, Eloise," he returned at last, "but you will change your mind some day—mark my words—you will change your mind."

CHAPTER X.

SOMETHING NEW.

"Look at the bright side! Recount all thy joys;
Speak of the mercies that richly surround thee:
Muse not forever on that which annoys,
Shut not thine eyes to the beauties around thee.
—*Selected*

Thekla's new book, "Influence," was the theme of all conversation. In this effort she had surpassed herself. The title had been approved by Levare, and if she never wrote another book this alone would have been sufficient to make her name famous. She was sitting in her boudoir to-night before a blazing fire. It was the twenty-third of December and bitterly cold. It was nearly eight, and she was going to witness the drama, "Influence," taken from her book, and she felt a trifle nervous about it.

"Tell Mr. Nevarro I will be down in a moment," she called.

She took her opera cloak from a chair and made her way to the drawing room.

Nevarro rose to greet her.

"Ah! Punctual to a moment!" he said, smiling. "Let us go now. I want to see every act.

The people are wild over your book, and you need not be surprised if you receive an ovation to-night. The theatre will be packed with people anxious to see just what sort of a person 'Thekla' is."

"Well, I hope they will not be disappointed," she said, as she took his arm and they went down the steps. He hands her into the carriage and takes his place beside her, and they are rapidly whirled away.

Eloise was conscious of doing Nevarro an injustice; yet how could she prevent it? Why was it, she asked herself with bitter resentment, that Serrell could not have been the one to enjoy this "social triumph" with her instead of Nevarro? She had hoped that he would ask her to go with him to-night, but instead, he had taken Lillian, as usual. He seemed to favor Nevarro's being constantly with her, she mused rebelliously. Well, since he didn't care, she concluded to be especially nice to Nevarro from henceforth, to be even; for she was quite determined to "die game," whatever the cost. Eloise had good blood in her veins. She suddenly became aware that her companion was talking.

"Would you believe it?" he was saying. "It is snowing right along. Zida was wishing only this afternoon that it would snow to-night, so we could go from Charleston to Gray Turrets in a sleigh, and I believe her wish is to be gratified. Have you made all necessary preparations?"

"Yes, I will be quite ready by to-morrow," she replied. "I am delighted with the idea of going. Just think, we will spend a week at that dear old

place! Zida showed me a picture of it yesterday and I am charmed."

There was a moment's silence.

"Do you hear from Ada now?" Nevarro presently asked, as they are nearing their destination.

"I have had but one letter since she went away," she answered. "I cannot understand why she has not written me oftener. She has been gone a month now."

"I don't know how true it is," Earle said, "but it is rumored that she has gone to Atlanta to enter suit for divorce."

Eloise was stupefied.

"No, Earle," she said, in a shocked voice, "*surely* not? It isn't possible."

"Nevertheless there must be something to it," he replied; "for it is in everybody's mouth, and you know the old saying: 'Where there is so much smoke.' She left here ostensibly to visit her aunt, but Ballette has disappeared, too, and it's certain he is not with his wife, and now that they are gone everybody says that they lived miserably, and that they mutually agreed to separate. I don't know why, but I have always expected this. They were everything but congenial, and Ballette has such an ungovernable temper."

Eloise was too dumbfounded to speak.

"We are not very much accustomed to this down South, you know," he went on, "and everyone is shocked at this unexpected denouement of what was considered the most beautiful and fitting marriage of the season. It is a very un-

wise decision for Ada. She has not enough ballast to successfully and honorably follow the course she has chosen. I do not believe in divorce. You writers are want to prate of the evils of rum and social intemperance generally, while you blindly close your eyes to the fact that an evil of far greater magnitude than any of these is moving thousands strong, shielded by the best society, and allowed by law. Why don't you fight that? We harp on the lesser evils, and close our eyes and sleep while this foe to moral purity steals the life blood of our common and domestic happiness. This is a wide field for you young novelists. Cease wasting your time in writing of the heroic and impossible achievements and heroes and heroines who never existed and fight this socially tolerated monster, which, unless trampled under foot, will eventually succeed in making of our country the home of moral and social degradation. There is nothing more corrupt and immoral than our modern society, and the young man or woman who constantly withstands its temptations is a wonder."

By this time they were at the theatre, and a hundred brilliant lights flashed from the windows and fell across the pavement. The orchestra was playing one of those "catchy" airs that appeal to us instantly, as on the arm of Nevarro Eloise went up the long flight of granite steps. The lights fell upon her face, and Earle looking down at that moment felt a pardonable pride in being fortunate enough to be with her. They were a striking couple, and many eyes fol-

lowed them admiringly as they passed through the ante-room to the scene of the play, and Eloise, remembering a certain remark of Nevarro's, experienced a somewhat weak and thrilling sensation, for as Earle had hinted, and she herself had secretly feared, no sooner had they entered the room than someone near had recognized her and immediately set up a loud hand-clapping. This was accepted as the signal, and then someone near the stage stood up and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, allow me the pleasure of introducing to you Miss Eloise Venarez, alias 'Thekla,' the gifted author of the book 'Influence,' which we have dramatized and will present to you to-night. The young woman who with her pen has done more for humanity than has any other writer for half a century."

The audience rose *en masse,* and the theatre thundered with applause. Eloise bowed and smiled in a dazed sort of way. She caught sight of Zida's radiant face, then she saw Serrell and Lillian, and despite her timidity she felt a thrill of triumph. Scores of glasses were turned upon her. As in a dream she heard Earle thanking the audience in a few well selected words in her behalf, and then they applauded again. Earle could always be depended upon to say and do the proper thing at the proper moment. And then amid a shower of flowers she was allowed to enter her box.

"I can't endure this," she whispered to Nevarro, after they are safe behind the curtain. "I felt as though I should sink through the floor.

Of all things I dislike publicity most. I never thought of this when I gave my permission to the thing. Why didn't you tell me?"

She looked so utterly surprised and crestfallen that Nevarro laughed.

"We Southerners never do anything by halves," he said at last.

The play was a tremendous success, as everyone had predicted, for in spite of its sober and somewhat discouraging title, the book contained some very amusing characters and situations which took the audience by storm, and Eloise felt amply repaid for all her loss of sleep and untiring energy which she had spent upon the book. Two hours later they were driven home under the pale light of the stars, and she exulted secretly when she remembered that once or twice during the play, when she glanced across in Levare's direction, he had been watching her with an expression that revealed much of what he was experiencing at that time. The next day, after a three hours' journey, they reached Charleston about sunset, and after a short while succeeded in procuring sleighs, in which they started off for Gray Turrets, twelve miles away. It was a jolly party, despite the fact that the mercury was standing at 20 degrees below freezing point; and as they skimmed along Zida's merry little laugh rang out on the clear, crisp air. It takes a good deal to dampen the enthusiasm of a pretty, fun-loving girl of nineteen with the anticipation of a jolly time just ahead.

Jack was evidently making himself pretty interesting. They were really sorry when the

manse loomed just ahead and they were at their journey's end.

"My! But isn't this fine weather?" Nevarro says, as they all go up the steps and hurry into the room where a bright fire is burning and crackling in the great wide fireplace. "It's the coldest spell we've had in ten years, and it will be fine fun on the lake to-night."

"Yes, the snow is six inches deep on a level," Zida says, "and it's a fine thing we didn't have to walk far in it," sticking out one small shoe to the fire, "our feet would have been frozen."

The good Mrs. McDonald bustled around making things comfortable.

"Well, this fire is grateful," Nevarro says, unbuttoning his faultlessly fitting overcoat, "it would thaw an iceberg in ten minutes."

At supper Earle said suddenly: "I have a paper in my pocket which confirms the report we all heard concerning Ballette and his wife."

"What?" Zida and Lillian exclaimed. "You don't mean it, Earle Nevarro?"

"Yes, but I do, though," he said.

"Well, if that isn't the—the mischief!" Zida said. She came near using another expression, but her mother's near presence prevented.

"What a disgrace!" Mrs. Van said, holding up her hands in horror.

"And she has been married such a short time," added Mrs. Nevarro. "It is such a blow to her aunt's pride. My, my! This is really very sad!"

Eloise was quite silent.

Levare cleared his throat.

"When I first entered upon my professional career," he said, "I looked upon divorce as absolutely immoral. But the longer I live and the more of life I see the more clearly am I convinced that such a course is necessary in order to save fickle humanity untold misery and unhappiness. We have heard that it takes years to cement a friendship, but months, weeks, and even days, are often sufficient to fit persons for the holier state of matrimony. If we were more than human there would be no need for such a provision, but as such is not the case we are just as liable to make a mistake in this great life-transaction as in anything else. As women and men are usually artificial toward each other before marriage, they never really know each other until afterward, and often this knowledge of each other's character is a revelation. Although our native state does not under any circumstances grant divorce, I cannot agree that this law is an altogether wise and justifiable one. If in every-day transactions we make a bargain which is apparently fair, and find afterwards that we have been duped, it is deemed proper that the parties are free to 'rue back,' for we can never be compelled to keep anything which we have obtained under false pretense. I do not think that God joins all married people together, though"—glancing at Earle—"I believe it was you who said that a man never got the woman who was not intended for him unless he got another man's wife?"

But Earle answered:

"I don't know so much about *that;* but I don't hold with divorce, and this state's laws along

that line suit me exactly. If I marry unwisely I will compel my wife to live with me. And this plural divorce business is a reflection on modern civilization; it is damning. Its recognition tends to lower man's estimate of the sacredness of the marriage relation, and causes him to improperly consider the binding obligations. It should not be tolerated."

"Down South," Levare says, "to be known as a 'grass widow' or widower, as the case may be, is equivalent to disgrace. Pitiable, indeed, is the lot of the man or woman who has to live out the remainder of their lives under this most undesirable appellation. It is an unnatural state of existence and must necessarily result in unhappiness. Too often do we find it the case, where the man or woman after being deceived in husband or wife lose confidence in their sex forever; and the aspirations of such a person are not apt to soar very high. It is a humiliation which no woman should tolerate, to be forced to bear through life the name of the man whose indifference or neglect has caused her to abhor him. To live together when the spark of love has died, merely for the sake of appearances—through a mistaken view of public opinion—is a disgrace to the marriage relation and a mockery to God. What can we expect from the offspring of such a union? Then would it not be better for all parties concerned, better for society, if the innocent party can find one whom they can respect and love and enjoy the blessings of a happy home? Because a man or woman happens to marry one with whom happiness is impossible it does not

signify that their case is hopeless—that they are utterly untractable. The same person might make a second choice and enjoy life. We have but one life to live, and no amount of public estimation can repay us for a life of unhappiness."

They rose from the table and passed through the hall to the sitting-room, and a moment later the girls had donned their jackets and gloves preparatory to going to the lake. Jack was in a jolly, rollicking mood to-night as he drew on his overcoat and stood for a moment beside Zida, waiting for her to adjust her turban.

"What is the matter with you?" she asked, suddenly, looking up into his face. "Haven't you had a drop too much, Jack? and do you think you can skate to-night without being in momentary danger of breaking your neck?"

"Yes, me darlint," taking her arm and going down the steps with her. "I always manage to stay on top of my feet. Have no fear; they're big enough to hold me up."

It was only a few hundred yards to the lake. Earle and Eloise were in the lead, and Lillian and Levare next. Like a black, shapeless apparition followed John Stark (Mrs. Van's groom), carrying an armful of skates. Andrew McDonald, the old Scotchman, had gone on ahead to make things comfortable before the young people should arrive. The lake was already dotted over with enthusiastic skaters from the city. An immense fire burned in the fireplace of the Inn.

"Come!" Nevarro says, as he buckles on his skates. "We are missing it all."

They swung off down the ice-covered pond as

gracefully as two young swallows. Levare watched them a moment; then taking Lillian's hands in his own they started out in pursuit. Nevarro was an excellent skater, in fact he was in the lead in anything in which grace and gallantry were the necessary requisites, and Serrell, watching him, wondered what chance a man like himself could have against such a rival. How could he blame Eloise if she did love Nevarro? He was just the type of man to whom women usually lose their hearts. He didn't blame her, for he couldn't blame her for anything she did, but nevertheless he admitted to himself that if such were the case he himself would feel it pretty keenly. Once in passing Eloise's scarf became loosened and caught on Serrell's arm. He pressed the bright bit of merino to him, but in her swift, mad gallop she heeded it not. After a time they all started out for the Inn, whose hospitable doors were thrown wide open to admit the gay throng that went surging in. The jolly old McDonald, seated beside the roaring fire, put his fine old violin to his shoulder and drew the bow across its strings.

Nevarro turned to Eloise.

"Have you not yet changed your mind about waltzing?" he asked. "Please do," earnestly, "for this once, won't you?"

"No," she answered, shaking her pretty head decisively; "no, I'm quite as firm as ever on that point."

"It is mere prejudice, Miss Venarez," he said, disappointedly. "I think you might give under for this time."

"Please don't insist," she said. "I really don't care to waltz."

The old violinist had struck out on one of those old, half-forgotten waltz tunes which our mothers loved so well, and which, in spite of time, appeal to us just as strongly now as they did to them years ago.

Zida and Jack were whirling about the room in the giddy mazes of the waltz. She was looking very winning in her skating habit of dark blue velvet, with its trimmings of ermine. Jack was proving the veracity of his statement: "that he was able to stay on his feet." He was enjoying himself so immensely that it really did one good to watch him. Lillian, with a bright, happy smile on her pretty face, was waltzing with Levare.

Eloise watched them with an uncalled-for feeling of resentment in her heart. For the first time in her life she found herself wishing that Lillian were out of the way. She wished Earle would find someone else to talk to; she did not care to dance at all. Contrary to her wishes that young man took a seat beside her, saying as he did so:

"Then if you will allow me, I will sit this out with you? I prefer talking to you rather than dancing with anyone else."

Eloise was too deeply absorbed with her own bitter reflection to reply to this gallant speech.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "What are you thinking about?"

"Oh, this, that and the other!" she said laughing a little. "I couldn't tell what I was thinking

of. For one thing I believe I was thinking I am tired."

"Which means, I suppose, that you would rather I would go on about my business and leave you alone?"

"Oh, no; I didn't say that," indifferently.

He looked at her and smiled.

"But you meant it. I am very sorry," was his truthful assertion. "I wanted to ask you to dance the next cotillion with me—the one after this."

"Well," she said, hoping that in the meantime Serrell might come to her a moment; "I will be ready to dance then, perhaps. I want to rest now."

He thanked her and went off in quest of another partner. He soon succeeded, however, for presently he appeared with a beautiful girl whom she had seen several times, but did not know. At the same time Levare made his way toward her. Eloise raised her eyes to his as he approached. The blood rushed to her fair face, and then receded, leaving her paler than before. She lowered her eyes, for she felt that he must read her secret. A second later he stood before her.

"If it is not too cold, Eloise," he said, "do you mind walking out on the piazza with me?"

The girl rose silently and slipped her hand into his arm.

What was the cold to her? She had hoped for this moment and now it had come. They passed down the length of the room and out into the veranda. Levare drew the gloved hand further within his arm. Nevarro's gaze followed them

and a peculiar light shone in his eyes as they passed out of the room.

"Allow me to restore this to you," Serrell said, drawing the scarf from his pocket and placing it around her shoulders. "You might take cold."

Silence a moment.

"Do you remember I told you this evening that I wanted to speak to you, Eloise?" he began, suddenly. "It seemed that the Fates were against me. If you will listen I will tell you how a certain dear little woman has found her way to my heart—how I have been loving her for years and could hardly realize it. But now I am certain that I love her better than life, better than I can express, for words are such feeble, useless things when we try to discuss this passion which we know as Love."

Eloise had withdrawn her hand from his arm and was looking out across the lake. She did not notice this little action, which to poor Serrell meant so much. She realized that this was the supreme moment of her life and she was unconscious of all else. Levare accepted this involuntary movement of hers as a sign that it was useless for him to proceed. He was seized by a sudden vertigo, and leaning against the wall and taking both her hands within his own he said:

"Am I too late, Eloise? Is it then as I feared? I had hoped——"

He broke off, unable to proceed, and looked intently into her face. A sudden wave of bitter feeling—terrible—unbearable in its intensity, swept over his soul.

"Why, Eloise, you are crying!" he said ten-

derly, roused into speech by the sight of tears in the eyes of the woman he loved best on earth, "What is it? Hush, dear! I will not force you to listen to me if it causes you pain. I wanted to explain something to you; something that concerns Lillian and myself."

Then *that* was it! Eloise felt nervous and weak as from illness. She raised her eyes to his; she had not been able to do so *until* now. But what need she care. His confession did not concern herself at all. It was Lillian all along, and he merely thought that as an old and true friend she would be interested. He had never loved her, and her life had built upon that hope. In that bitter moment the question arose to her: "He has never loved me; merciful heaven, how to endure?" He noticed the tense, drawn lines around her sweet mouth and mistook them for pity. In bitterness of spirit he spoke:

"I had feared this, Eloise, and yet I cherished that hope."

"But she loves you, Serrell," the sweet voice broke in, forgetting her own despair at what she imagined to be an expression of his disappointment. "Can you not see how much? There is no need to be so sad. What has come over you. You were not always so. I remember you long ago as appearing quite satisfied, almost happy."

He swallowed almost audibly. Ah! she had touched him to the quick then! The memory of happier moments when suddenly recalled are sometimes more than we can bear. He mused bitterly that in the days to which she referred hope had not died out of his heart.

"She loves you so much, so much," she went on, trying to bring a different expression into his face.

"Lillian is a sweet girl. I wish you all happiness and congratulate you with all my heart."

Lillian? Good God! Was it possible that she believed that?

"A great sorrow has come into my life within the last few months," he said, and his voice sounded far away.

She raised her clear eyes to his.

"I couldn't understand, could I, Serrell? Would you mind telling me? Sometimes sorrows are more endurable when confided to another, you know."

His deep voice shook. "No," he answered, hopelessly; "this would be beyond your comprehension."

The music inside had passed into a minor key; its sweet, plaintive notes had something human in their despair. Perhaps the white haired violinist was putting something of his past, which the scenes before him recalled, into its melody. It touched Eloise's heart like an echo of her ruined life.

"So you have changed your mind as to remaining single all your life?" he said, pressing gently the hand he held. "You remember I predicted you would. You needn't mind telling me, dear," sadly, "for I'm the best friend you have on earth to-night. There! do not weep," as two big tears roll down her cheeks. "No one wishes you more happiness than I, and Nevarro is a good fellow."

He gazed tenderly down into her eyes, emphasizing his words with a gentle pressure on her hand, though the bitterness of death lay at his heart. He had allowed himself to think of her as an integral part of his future life many times. It had become the one vital hope of his existence, and now it was over! He seemed to have reached a sudden blank in his life beyond which he could not see.

There was silence between them for one brief, bitter moment.

"Eloise," he said, suddenly, "no matter how far our pathways may lie apart in the future, remember me as one who would sacrifice his life to serve you."

He placed his hand upon her dark hair.

"You deserve a good husband, Eloise, and I think he will prove such to you, and may heaven so deal with Earle Nevarro as he deals with you."

She seemed to have lost the power of speech, and he went on:

"In after years, when you are happy in another man's love, shedding your noble influence over his home and heart, remember with tender compassion the one who could never be anything nearer to you than a friend."

The truth flashed suddenly upon Eloise. He believed her to be in love with Earle. Perhaps that was why he did not declare himself to her. If it was otherwise why, if he loved Lillian, did he appear so melancholy always?

"Let me explain——" she began, feeling indescribable. "I—there has been a mistake——"

But just here Nevarro came upon the scene.

"This is our dance, Miss Venarez," he said, somewhat formally, "if you mean to keep your promise?"

Levare had turned away with a scarcely perceptible bow as he came up, and walked off down the veranda. Yes, it must be true, he reasoned, or else why did Nevarro so persistently follow her? And what right had he to address her in that dictatorial manner if it were otherwise?

Eloise accepted Nevarro's proffered arm.

"Yes, certainly I mean to dance it."

CHAPTER XI.

A SOUTHERN DEER HUNT.

Eloise was delighted with the grand old place. She was not satisfied until she had been in every room and closet in the house. It had been quite late when they retired and during the night the temperature had risen somewhat, a condition which they all hailed with joy, for there was a deer hunt in projection for to-morrow. Eloise rose early, and without waiting for her companions, dressed hurriedly, and donning her jacket, she slipped quietly downstairs. Mrs. McDonald was already up. She looked up in surprise as Eloise paused at the door.

"Merry Christmas!" the girl called quickly.

"Why, where are ye gang sae sune, young leddy?" the good woman ejaculates, looking up from her work in astonishment. "There's nae ane up but me and the servants."

"Yes, I know," the girl answered. "Please don't tell anyone I am gone, auntie, I want to go to the stables, and to the kennel. You know I didn't get to see the horses and dogs last night, and I'm a dear lover of both. I'll be back in a little while."

She made her away across the yard and to the stables. One beautiful black creature stood look-

ing through the glass as she approached and whined familiarly.

"Oh, you beauty!" she cried rapturously, putting her face against the pane. "You think I've brought your breakfast, don't you? I'm very sorry, but I haven't a thing for you. I hope you'll be the one I'll ride to-day, old boy."

Then as all the horses began trying to tell her how badly they wanted their Christmas breakfast, she turned hurriedly away, with a look of apprehension toward the windows of the manse.

"I think I'd better go before I'm discovered."

She passed on to the kennel and made friends with the dogs, a pack of fine hounds who met her at the door eagerly, evidently of the same impression of which the horses had been. She looked up again at the windows of the huge gray stone structure to ascertain if the inmates were yet astir, but seeing no signs of life she set out. In front of her there loomed the dark, picturesque forest of huge cypresses and water oaks. A row of the former grew on either side of the drive up to the very doors. To the left, as far as she could see, stretched a level plain. This, she had been told, was in summer a waving mass of growing rice. In a long, narrow street behind the house ran two rows of small huts, which had been built in ante-bellum days, and which, the girl thought, could they but speak, would tell many a tale concerning a generation and epoch now passing away. The rows of water-oaks extended far beyond these huts. Negroes lived in them still, who were employed by the young master of Gray Turrets to labor in those fields of rice and make them-

selves generally useful. A smile came to the girl's lips as the words of an old, old love song occurred to her:

"And all of this, fair lady, may be thine."

Yes, she realized that. It could be all her own if she so willed it—this picturesque and grand old relic of a past generation, these vast fields, that romantic dark forest—those magnificent horses—all could be hers at a word. She mused and the smile lingered on her mouth, for a woman enjoys nothing so much as the knowledge of her own power.

Eloise entered just as the bell for breakfast sounded. They met her at the dining-room door.

"We are waiting for you," Earle said, smiling down at her and conducting her to a seat.

It was a jolly repast, at the conclusion of which Earle rose and proposed a toast to the ladies, which was drunk with relish. Then Jack poised his glass and said:

"Here's to the hunt of to-day and may it be a howling success."

That was drunk also, and then Nevarro announced that the season's gifts had been sent into the sitting-room and that they would go thither and inspect.

Eloise found that Nevarro's gift to herself was a pearl and gold writing pen, filagree silver and cut glass inkstand, and a daintily set birthstone ring.

"I cannot thank you sufficiently," she said to Nevarro, as she slipped the pretty ring on her

white finger. "It is lovely of you. I really cannot adequately thank you."

"You have done so already," he replied in a low tone.

Serrell's card was attached to an exquisite volume of vellum-bound, gold-lettered "Poems of Passion," and others from all the party too numerous to mention. Miss Lillian and Zida, too, had been handsomely remembered, and the latter was rejoicing greatly in the possession of a Roman gold bracelet, studded with moonstones, and which had her name and the date engraved inside in old English. It completed her set, she said.

After many exclamations of surprise and pleasure they laid their numerous and pretty baubles aside, and began hurriedly arranging themselves in their riding habits, for they were to start early. A moment later they came down all a-flutter with excitement, to find the boys quite ready, gorgeous in the matter of buckskin leggins and hunting jackets. Eloise stood at the top of the broad, granite steps, her dark blue habit caught up in one small gauntleted hand. In the other she carried a tiny silver-mounted riding whip. John Stark led the horses out. They were already saddled, and the one that Eloise had fancied so that very morning stood tethered to the rack—a regular racer, his long, lithe body shining in the morning sun like black satin. Earle went to the kennel and opened the door. Instantly the pack of magnificent hounds surrounded him, all whining familiarly, and leaping upon their young master's shoulders in joyful recognition. They

seemed to realize that this thing happened but once a year, and with a glad barking they ran over the grounds, smelling the earth as they went. They as well as the horses seemed wild with anticipation. Lillian and Zida were already nounted. Zida on a magnificent gray that pranced restlessly, and threw its fine head up and down. eager to be off. Miss Lillian rode the gentlest horse of all—a meek-eyed chestnut mare, which her father had ridden fifteen years before. In fact she would rather not have gone at all, for she was afraid of horses and did not anticipate much pleasure in the hunt. But it would never do to remain behind, and Serrell was going, and that young man's presence had become very necessary to Lillian's peace of mind. As for Eloise, poor child! She had hardly slept a wink the night before. She had lain awake and tried to think of a way to explain matters to Levare, for she found herself in a very unpleasant and embarrassing situation. Earle assisted Eloise to mount, and then vaulting into his saddle he blew the horn he carried (relic of other days) and amid a tumultuous barking they started off. Mrs. Van and Nevarro stood leaning against one of the huge granite columns, watching them off, the faint December sun falling across their faces. The crowd of blacks had come around to witness the off-start, too—gay in red bandannas and brightly hued linsey frocks. Old Aunt Dinah, seventy, if a day, stood watching as the merry party started off amid the loud blowing of the horn and the deep baying of a score of hounds who ran ahead singly, their noses to the ground.

"La! But dat do bring back de ole times!" she exclaimed. "It's menny a yere since ole Dinah see sech a sight afore. Young master and a crowd o' young genmens useter hunt in dem woods forty yere ago."

Mrs. Van and Nevarro went slowly back into the house. A dreamily sad expression was in the former's eyes.

"Do you remember, Mildred," she asks, as they stand before the great cypress fire, "how happy we used to be years ago when we were starting off on a trip like that? Age," sadly, "takes the sweetness out of everything."

Our party rode on. The hounds were on the scent, as their peculiar, long-drawn barking betokened. They circled around and passed quite near the hunters, and then in a long unbroken line they went on, and their deep barking grew gradually indistinct.

"Come!" Earle called, blowing the horn he carried and touching up his horse, which started off in a swinging gallop. "We must keep up with them. They're on the wind now. Keep your eyes open!"

They dashed off into the forest at breakneck speed, Eloise and Earle in the lead. Jack and Zida came next, and Lillian and Serrell brought up the rear. The baying came nearer. A glimpse of something—a slim, dun-colored creature, hotly pursued, fleeing for its very life, passed meteor-like a few yards from them.

"Look out there!" Earle called, and instantly three quick loud reports rang out. There was a moment of eager, breath-suspended expectation.

But when the smoke cleared no beautiful inanimate creature lay before them. There was an ejaculation of surprise, and then they set off again. Then for it! Through thick and thin, over brush, across ditches they went. The chase had become madly exciting, that is—it had with Nevarro, who was a born sportsman, and who for the time being forgot all else beside. But another thought was uppermost in Levare's mind that was of vastly more interest than deer hunting. Nevarro spurred his horse and touched with his whip the one Eloise rode, and cheering the dogs onward at the top of his voice they pursued. Somehow they became divided. Perhaps Providence took a hand in affairs just then. I don't know. Anyway, a few seconds later Eloise found herself riding beside Serrell. The others had gone on.

"Aren't you a little tired?" he asked, reining up his horse. "Let's drop behind a little."

"I *am* tired," she said, "I was so afraid I wouldn't see you to-day," coloring slightly, yet quite determined. "I wanted to explain matters to you a little, Serrell," looking up beseechingly, and meeting his dark eyes fixed upon her face. "I wanted to tell you," she went on, "that you didn't understand me last night. I am not engaged to Earle nor to anyone else. I have never had an opportunity of accepting him, and if I had it would be all the same."

Then fearful lest she should commit herself: "I don't want to be engaged to anybody. I'm quite satisfied as I am."

Now Eliose knew, as we know, that she was uttering a falsehood, but she was afraid that Ser-

rell might take this as a suggestion, and oh! she could never endure that!

He regarded her a moment incredulously.

"Eloise," he said very seriously, "I could not believe it, even though I feared——"

"Look out there!" came Earle's cautioning reminder. Just then he was somewhere near, though hidden—and just before them, trembling in every nerve, the beautiful doe stood at bay.

Levare raised his rifle to his shoulder.

"Don't shoot the beautiful thing, Serrell!" the girl pleaded, laying her hand over his. "See how frightened it is! To kill it would be cruel. Spare it for my sake!"

He dropped his gun quickly.

"Yes," he said. "You're a big-hearted, generous little woman, Eloise. You'd spare anything pain, I believe, even a dog; and yet—if you only knew how you had caused me to suffer—dear little woman," tenderly, "you would pity me——"

And just at this juncture the whole party rode up.

* * * *

Our friends had to give up the chase for that day, and it was quite two o'clock when they emerged from the forest, somewhat crestfallen, perhaps, for Earle exclaimed:

"Well, that beats the record! I saw that animal twice and shot at it both times and never touched it. Didn't you see it after we left you, Levare?"

"No," Serrell said, while he looks at Eloise mischievously.

CHAPTER XII.

A TURNING POINT.

"Well have I seen that castle,
That castle by the sea,
And the moon above it standing,
And the mists rise solemnly.
The winds and the waves of ocean,
Had they a merry chime?
Did'st thou hear from those lofty chambers,
The harp and the minstrel's rhyme?"

It was quite nine o'clock. Already the guests had begun to arrive from the city. In the west wing the young ladies were arraying themselves for the dance. It had been previously understood that the men were to go *en masque,* but were not to represent any character. The young ladies were to assume fancy costumes of their own selection. They thought it would be so much more interesting, they said. The dance was of a somewhat unique character, inasmuch as the young men were to be blindfolded and one by one the young ladies were to be led before them, when they would pause and bowing, would say:

"Ah! Good evening, Sir Knight!"

The poor fellow must recognize the voice of the young lady whom he wished to be his part-

ner throughout the dance, and pronounce her name. If he was so unfortunate as to guess the wrong lady the penalty for his rashness was that he must remain a "stag" throughout the dance, only being allowed to dance with chance partners. It is to be supposed that there were at least a few present who did not object to the rigidity of the above mentioned penalty. The ladies must suffer in consequence of the men's stupidity, for in case the men guessed the wrong name they had to pass on to be partners for said stags. Each man was allowed but one chance, and if he missed, the young lady must sit down. They were led before him and one by one they spoke. If he did not recognize his sweetheart's voice he must wait until he *did,* and then he must rise, and bowing gallantly, say:

"How do you do, my lady?"

If he guessed aright the bandage was removed from over his eyes amid the cheers of all present, and he was free to enjoy his companion's society for the rest of the night. If otherwise, there was a general laugh, and both unfortunates were ostracized from the ring of guessers. Of course, all things considered, this looked somewhat hard upon the unoffending young ladies, but it was enforced in order to make the guesser doubly careful. It had originated in Nevarro's ingenious brain, as usual—perhaps he had a motive—and Eloise had a vague idea that she would be made to pass before him before Serrell had a chance, and she had a miserable foreboding that he would guess her, too.

The thrilling sound of stringed instruments be-

ing tuned broke in upon the murmurous stillness. They were almost ready. Zida turned from the mirror with a satisfied little smile.

"Will I do?" she asks, trailing her robe of white velvet across the carpet.

Eloise as "America" in her enhancing costume, Stars and Stripes, turned toward her.

"Yes, it is lovely, dear. You couldn't have chosen a characer more becoming. Your train adds several inches to your height, apparently, and makes you appear quite stately. Then your hair is the right shade and withal you make quite a charming 'Queen Mary."

Someone came to the door just then.

"Everything is ready," they said. There was a few hurried remarks, the soft swish of silken garments, a girl's soft laugh, a quick glance into the long mirror, and then the door was opened and the merry party streamed down the stairs and into the wide hall. At the foot of the stairs, however, they paused, uncertain as to whether they must go in yet or not.

"Come in," Mrs. Nevarro said, coming to the door. "They are quite ready."

The young men stood up as they entered. Then Earle spoke. "Now I must blindfold you all. Sit down."

When he had finished, one of the musicians tied a 'kerchief over his eyes.

"Now," he said, taking his place in line with the others, "some one will please bring the ladies up, and the guessing contest will begin."

Zida was first to be taken up. She paused before Jack with the usual salutation. He rose, and

pressing his hand over his heart in a manner that convulsed the others with laughter, said:

"Miss Van Worth. How are you, my lady?"

There was a loud clapping of hands, and Earle said:

"Good for you! Take off his mask." Miss Lillian came next and was guessed; and so on until it came to Nevarro. All the girls were in turn presented to him, but he held his peace. When it came Eloise's turn she inwardly quailed. I cannot clear Eloise of changing her voice a little, but Earle bowed gallantly before her.

"Miss Venarez. How are you, my lady?" Poor Levare's heart felt like a leaden weight in his bosom. He had hoped so much for to-night; he had intended to ask Eloise a question he had attempted to ask her twice before, and both times Nevarro had interrupted him. He was beginning to regard Earle as his evil genius.

The girl felt a bitter, unreasonable resentment against Nevarro. Had he no eyes, no brains? Couldn't he see that she would much prefer being with Serrell? She lapsed into a dull apathy, she hardly heard what he was saying. Her interest in the evening's festivities was destroyed. And yet! How could she wound his feelings? Kind hearted, generous Earle! If he cared for her how could he help it? Instead of hungering after the impossible why could she not love him? So the poor girl reasoned while she rebelled against fate. Earle was doubly interesting to-night, and poor Eloise answered his many questions in monosyllables.

"Will you dance this time, Miss Venarez?" Ne-

varro asks as the music strikes up a lively air. "Or had you rather sit it out?"

Eloise rallied her sinking spirits with an effort. Yes, she might as well dance. It would be no worse than to sit here and to be compelled to sustain a conversation. So she took his arm, and they passed the width of the room to their places. The music was entrancing, but to poor Eloise it seemed a mockery to her discomfiture.

"Let us go into the hall," said Earle, after the dance was over. "You look tired, and these crowded rooms are a bore. There is no one in the hall and we can talk."

She didn't fancy a tete-a-tete with Nevarro just now, but she fancied that nothing could be worse than the present state of affairs. In the hall she breathed more freely. They were sitting on a tete-a-tete, under a spreading palm, when Earle suddenly, passionately exclaimed:

"Eloise I love you! I worship you! Can you not see that I do? I thought to keep my love for you a secret, but you with your beauty and angelic purity have forced me into confessing that which I had so hoped to remain hidden from you. You need not tell me that it is hopeless—that I am too late, for I read it on your face, and yet please do not stop me. One year ago I imagined I loved a woman, but I've lived to learn that it was a passing fancy. Compared to what I feel for you it was nothing—nothing. I was a fool——"

"But Earle," she said, now really interested, "I thought that Zida and you were engaged? Has she—?"

"She has done nothing. She is just what she

has always been to me. I proposed to her merely through pique. We have come to a mutual understanding of each other. I have been an idiot, dear, but this is not idiocy I assure you. I'm perfectly rational now. When I thought myself in love with Ada it was merely an infatuation for a pretty face. I could not fancy her disposition. When one falls in love with beauty only there is a chance for his recovery, but when we learn to love a person's mind and disposition it is a desperate case; there is little chance of our ever outgrowing it. That is the kind of love I bear to you, Eloise. You are beautiful enough, heaven knows, but it is only one of your many charms. I love your character. In the short time that I have known you I have studied you closely, and I have found that you can have no trifling thoughts or else your actions could not be what they always are. Eloise you are the one good woman I have known—the one whose love could inspire me with noble aspirations, could make of my life something truly good. I said, the first time I saw you, 'There is a real woman, the kind one often reads of but seldom meets. She will never give her hand where her heart cannot go.' I cannot blame you if you love another, but tell me what I must do? You who have the power to steal my heart and make my future without you impossible, I beseech you, tell me what I am to do? I cannot face life as of old. I cannot really. Why does God in His infinite wisdom give you women the power to ruin our lives and then put you beyond our reach? We can no more resist your charms than we can fly. Tell me," he went on passionately, taking her

hands in his own. "Tell me what is to become of me?"

The girl's tender heart was deeply touched; yet what could she say? She could not lead him on with false hopes. She felt his suffering keenly; she had experienced it all herself. Two tears trickled down her cheeks and fell upon his hands. Nevarro accepted this as an affirmative to his fears. "Never mind, dear," he said soothingly. "My poor little girl I pity you. As I love you I pity you; for I have seen this deception all along. Levare had no right to try to win your heart. He has given my sister to understand that he loves her. You have seen that, have you not Eloise? Of course you have. All the world has noticed what marked attention he is paying Lillian. Why this double dealing on his part? Why this deception? I confess I thought Levare above such an act. I do not know that he and Lillian are engaged, but I believe they are. He is a scoundrel—"

"Hush!" she said, horrified. "You have no right to speak of him that way. Believe me Earle, Serrell Levare has never tried to flirt with me; he has never proposed to me. I speak truth. I do not belive there is a more perfect gentleman living. He cares nothing for me—nothing!"

"Then why does he act as though he did?" he demanded. "Why, if he cares nothing for you as you say, does he pretend to? I cannot believe that he doesn't love you. If not he, then who has won your heart Eloise?" he went on passionately.

The girl shook her head sadly. "No one—no

one I assure you," she replied with a peculiar sadness in her voice.

"That will never do," Nevarro said. "Serrell loves you, Eloise. He seeks to hide it but cannot, for love will show itself—it will betray us in spite of all. No, he has never told me so, for he is very proud. If he loved to distraction and was not sure that his love was reciprocated, he would not admit it to anyone for the world."

"Then he has certainly kept it to himself," she answered.

"Then, my dear, who is it if not he?" he pleaded persistently.

"There is no one, Earle, I care for, nobody that way, and no one cares for me."

"In that you are mistaken, dear," he said quickly. "No one was ever more beloved than you are at this moment. I shall hope that one day you may not be able to say that, for I shall wait and hope," tenderly. "May I not? Look up and bid me hope, Eloise. For heaven's sweet sake do not send me from you, for outside of a hope in your love I have nothing before me; nothing but a dull, blank, aimless, hopeless existence. I came very near going to ruin before," he continued sadly, and with a touch of shame, "and had it not been for your noble influence, I would to-night have been a ruined man, for in spite of all his lordly attainments, man is but weak. A woman weilds a powerful influence over his life. All worthy men regard a true woman as God's masterpiece, and where their faith in them is destroyed is it any wonder that they often go to destruction? They deem all humanity base then, so what need they

care? My dear little woman," pressing her hands softly, and holding her gaze with his burning look, "it rests within your power to make a good man of me. I have been no saint, Eloise—I will be honest with you—what young man has? But if this little girl will trust her future to me she shall never be made to regret it. I promise her that my future will be an improvement on my past."

She looked at him earnestly. "But Earle," she said, somewhat regretfully perhaps, "I do not love you. You don't want a woman who doesn't care for you surely?"

"I will wait," he said, still clinging to this one frail chance of happiness. "I will wait—ten, twenty, thirty years—all my life; only let me hope."

Her silence seemed to madden him. "If you cannot love me for God's sake promise me one thing," he went on desperately, "never marry any other man while I live. Promise me, dear—promise me! I have thought it all over quietly, and I have decided that I cannot and will not endure it. If you send me from you, I will destroy myself. I will not live through it."

"No, Earle," she said calmly. "I shall never marry; and if you are satisfied to wait I will try my best to care for you."

From the depths of her soul she hoped that she might learn to love him. What did it profit her she reasoned bitterly to eat her heart out about the other one?

Nevarro raised her hand to his lips and kissed it reverently, passionately.

"Thank you, dear, for your blessed consolation," he murmured, "thank you! I can ask no more of you, Eloise. You can but try, and if the God whom you so reverence is as we are taught —all love, He will grant us what we ask. He will let you care for me. I believe I could make you happy, or I would not ask you to be mine. I believe that the truest, stanchest love is that which we must cultivate. Love at first sight is all very well for the very young and for novels; but in real life it is generally a failure. We cannot judge one's disposition at first sight, or upon a first acquaintance, and one thing in favor of the former plan is that we can never learn to care for an unworthy object."

That night in passing Eloise, after the guests had taken their departure, Levare touched her hand.

"Fate is against us," he said.

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"The winds and the waves of ocean,
They rested quietly;
But I heard on the gale a sound of wail,
And tears came to mine eye."

CHAPTER XIII.

ELOISE BOWS TO THE INEVITABLE.

"My life is cold and dark and dreary;
It rains, and the wind is never weary;
My thoughts still cling to the mouldering past,
But the hopes of youth fall thick in the blast,
And the days are dark and dreary."

The next morning Lillian did not come down to breakfast. She was suffering with a cold, and her throat was sore. She was very restless; her face was flushed and feverish—her pulse was quick. She complained of a pain in her side. Eloise sat near and watched anxiously the face of the physician who had been hastily summoned. In the absolute quiet which reigned for a few seconds, and which was broken only by the loud ticking of the doctor's watch, and the patient's labored breathing, they all watched him, anxiously awaiting his decision.

"High fever," he said, laconically, "a hundred and three. Why didn't you send for me sooner?"

Mrs. Nevarro became visibly agitated. "She was only taken ill this morning, doctor," she said, while her usually placid features grew keenly anxious. "She seemed quite well when she retired last night. Do you think her serious?"

anxiously. Dr. Hayden shook his head gravely.

"I cannot say," he answered. "She seems to have been unduly exposed. Her constitution is naturally weak, and her symptoms indicate typhoid pneumonia."

At the mention of that dreadful malady Mrs. Nevarro's face blanched, and she burst into hysterical weeping. The little doctor hastened to reassure her.

"My dear madam," he said hastily, "it is by no means a hopeless case and I hope that with proper care and attention the young lady will soon be restored to health. Give the medicine which I shall leave regularly, notice her symptoms closely, and if her fever has not cooled by five o'clock advise me." He took his departure.

Late in the afternoon a mounted servant was rushing madly toward the city. About sunset Dr. Hayden came, and with him another of the profession. He and the others watched throughout the long, winter night.

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The days wore on, and still she lay in that critical state; no worse perhaps, but no better. Day after day and night after night Eloise was at her place at Lillian's side. The girl had taken a fancy, so common among the sick, that no one but she could give her medicine or assist her in any way. The doctor had left her only once since the first day. In fact, two had been in constant attendance since then. Earle came and went. He was not satisfied away from her, and yet—he could not bear to see her suffer. On the sixth day Eloise had noiselessly left her place beside the bed (for

Lillian had fallen asleep) and had gone out upon the veranda. She had been in that close heated room so much, she felt that without air she would stifle. When she reached the front door she came upon Serrell, who was pacing the length of the veranda—his hands crossed behind him; his head bent and thoughtful. When he beheld her he paused abruptly, raising his eyes to her face questioningly.

"Is she worse?" he asked.

"No, I can't see any change," the girl answered. "But don't worry, Serrell," raising her eyes to his pityingly, "we have not given up hope yet. The doctors say there is still a chance for her. I sympathize with you so much," she went on laying her hand on his arm. "I can't blame you for being anxious, we all are; tho' I hope she will be spared to you, Serrell. It will be terrible if she is taken from you now."

Levare looked at her dumbfounded. Was it possible, he questioned himself incredulously, that she really believed that? It could not be! Yet he remembered now that he had never told her of her mistake when she had congratulated him nearly a week previous. He sincerely hoped for Lillian's recovery, but not because he loved her certainly. Suddenly the thought occurred to him that Lillian had more cause to think that he loved her than had Eloise. For three months he had paid her constant attention. He admitted to himself that she was justifiable in that belief; for how could she know that he had been a victim of circumstances? It was only natural that she should not understand, but should think his mo-

tive for seeking her society so constantly was prompted only by preference. When she was convalescent he meant to undeceive her; if, indeed, she had been deceived. He meant to ask Eloise to be his wife, and to have their engagement announced just as soon as she consented to make him happy. He drew the hand which lay upon his arm into his.

"Eloise, little woman, you are very much mistaken. It is not—" but the same perverse fate that had come between them all along interfered again, for just at this moment Zida came to the head of the stairs.

"Eloise?" she called quickly, "come quick!"

The girl turned and ran hastily up the stairs; a dreadful foreboding at her heart. They were bending over the bed, and Mrs. Nevarro was wailing aloud. Eloise's heart seemed suddenly to strangle her. Merciful God! was Lillian dying?

No; she had only fainted. She was drawing her breath in quick, short gasps. Mrs. Van Worth and Zida were rubbing her hands and face. They bore the stricken mother from the room. Inside the adjoining apartment Earle's voice, in a broken undertone, could be heard trying to console her. The doctor was forcing a little brandy between Lillian's lips.

"Take my place, Eloise," Zida said piteously, raising her streaming eyes to her friend's face. "I can't stand it any longer."

She went out as the other came up. Her small face was scared and white—she seemed about to swoon. In a moment Lillian opened her eyes. Eloise was bathing her face.

"Eloise!" she cried, in a sudden burst of terror. "Why did you leave me? Oh, I thought I was dying," pitifully; "and Eloise I'm afraid to die. Don't leave me again. I'm not good enough to die, Eloise——" But Eloise laid a soft hand on her lips.

"Hush!" she said gently. "Do not talk of dying, Lillian. Do try to rest, dear. I shall not leave you again."

She looked up into the true eyes, and with the perfect trust of a little child she fell asleep. All night long the girl sat there, her right arm under Lillian's head. The customary visitors came in for the night. In the hushed and solemn stillness of midnight Mrs. Nevarro, weak and exhausted from weeping, came and knelt at the bedside of her daughter. She was weeping still. The slight noise aroused the sleeper.

"Oh, Eloise," she cried with a start. "Where are you, dear? Do not leave me!"

"Here, Lillian—here I am," she said, laying her cheek against hers. "I am not going to leave you until you are better."

When the first faint streaks of dawn lighted up the eastern sky, she lay very, very quiet—a dreadful, unreal stare in her pale blue eyes—babbling senseless nothings. Many weary days and nights followed without any perceptible change. Eloise grew thin and pale; the brilliant light left her eyes—the sweet smile her lips. She ate but little, and that little was brought to her. She could not be induced to leave Lillian for a moment. She had promised her she would not, and she kept her promise faithfully. She would

do her part, she told herself, to make Serrell happy; though her tender heart grew sick with incessantly watching another's suffering. Her love was pure and unselfish. And this proud, scornful girl who in the old days hardly deigned to notice poor Eloise, now clung to her as though she were the very breath of life! Ah well! Suffering places all on an equal footing.

"Young woman," the little physician said to Eloise on the ninth day. "You must take a little exercise. You are keeping too close; it is killing you. Why you really look worse than my patient."

"I can't help it," she returned. "I shall certainly keep my promise to Lillian."

The little man turned to his friend. "That's what I call physical endurance. There's a constitution for you, eh?"

The morning wore on and about noon Earle came into the room. His eyes were heavy from loss of sleep—his face haggard from anxiety. He stood for a moment near the bed watching his sister's white face. Neither he nor Eloise uttered a word. They were alone, and Nevarro stood for a moment silently watching, and then her wasted face and hands suddenly touched a tense, drawn chord in his heart, and his rigidity snapped asunder. He moved a chair to the bedside and sinking into it, buried his face in his hands, and his form was shaken with sobs. The silence was unbroken save for that. Eloise watched him a moment in silence—her heart aching for him. There is something touching in a strong man's grief—something that appeals to our hearts in

spite of us. She suddenly spoke. "Earle, I wish I could console you. I wish I could tell you as one who knows, that Lillian will live; but," her voice broke a little, "in cases like this we realize our utter helplessness." There was a moment's silence, in which Lillian sighed deeply and slept on. Under the spell of an irresistible impulse she laid her hand upon his arm.

"Earle what lesson is taught us by this affliction? What is it sent upon us for?"

A broken sob fell from the man's lips.

"We are taught, Eloise," he said at last, "not to depend too much upon ourselves. Your belief is better than mine, dear, after all. Pray for her, Eloise. Do you think she will die?"

"I cannot say, Earle," went on that sweet voice. "I trust not. I have prayed that your darling sister may be spared to us; and I believe in prayer, Earle, but," and her voice trembles, "if God sees fit to remove her from our midst, do not forget that it is for our ultimate good. 'Tis such a consolation to believe in another existence. I have gone through all this long ago, and we can well sympathize with what we ourselves have suffered. I think God takes our dear ones sometimes so we may have an interest in Heaven, for 'Where your treasures are, there will your hearts be.' I had given but few thoughts to a hereafter until after mother died. And then when little Hugh left me, I grew to feel that a hope in a future life were too precious a thing to admit of impossibility. We are wont to feel very indifferent about a hereafter as long as all our interests are here upon earth, but when we

know we can see them no more here forever, and that in the resurrection lies our only hope, we are made to realize what a wondrously beautiful thing the hope of the Christian is."

"I never tried to pray before," the young man admitted, "but I *have* tried to pray for her, and the words go no farther than my lips. God and I are not acquainted. He seems out of reach—a great way off. I can hardly imagine Him as I petition. Sometimes I imagine He can have no interest in that which concerns me, or it would be otherwise. But I have tried, Eloise. At times I have become so weary with myself and with everything that I have made efforts to draw out from the old life and begin anew, though you may not believe it—but everywhere I turned temptation stood in my path. When a man is trying to reform the devil redoubles his exertions to drag him down, and no help is given him. I am quite sure that every man must work out his own salvation, despite all arguments to the contrary. That accounts in great measure for the alarming increase of infidelity. In this progressive age man is unwilling to believe or accept any religion that does not make itself manifest. It's a very pretty thing to say that God is doing all in His power to redeem the world; but if such be the case it argues but feebly for His power, for it is quite certain that if He so willed it He could do so by one thought. The prayer which we have always known says that He leads us into temptation—even He. So the odds are against us. I will make

one more final effort and I have promised to lead a better life, if He will but spare Lillian."

Promising God! Bribing God! Oh, finite incomprehension! Oh unworthiness! What a pitiful thing humanity is! And how prone we all are to do this! The clay promising obedience to the potter if he will but grant it a favor! Think of it, ye who have been guilty of a similar offence! The veriest slave—bought with so wondrous a price—the price of a Saviour's blood, offering the Creator a bribe if He will but grant him a favor! We can well believe that even amid the joys of Paradise the angels do sometimes weep!

The door opened quietly and the doctors came in together. There was a gravely serious expression on their faces. Earle rose and faced them, a pathetic, questioning look was in his eyes.

When twilight fell Levare came into the room, and paused at the foot of the bed. Lillian was delirious.

"Serrell," she murmured incoherently "if you care for me why do you not tell me? Why do you keep me waiting? It is cruel, cruel! I love you—love you so!"

Her voice died away in an inarticulate whisper. Eloise who was bending over her glanced up at him. He was standing as if rooted to the spot. His expression was one of despair. He turned his eyes to Eloise's face. There was a pathetic, beseeching look in them that went straight to her heart. "Speak to her, Serrell," she said, "perhaps she will know you!" But to her surprise he turned and walked out of the room.

Lillian was very low. Her breath was so slight she seemed already dead. Dr. Hayden sat by her now holding her hand. Mrs. Nevarro utterly exhausted knelt beside the bed. It is wonderful how we manage to keep up at a time like this. Mr. Van Worth had been sent for. Jack had gone home five days ago. Serrell remained. Eloise bent lower over the bed. One moment she looked up into the doctor's face and rose hurriedly——

There was a long, low, despairing wail in that chamber, and Mrs. Nevarro was borne fainting from the room.

In an agony of despair, unconscious of what he said or did, Earle grasped Eloise's hand. "This is too bitter!" he said, in a hoarse, unnatural voice. "Eloise, it will kill me." Then he broke into great, dry, heart-rending sobs.

"She is dying! How to endure?" That cry reached the ears of someone else, and in that dark hour when death hovered so near, forgetting self and future happiness, and remembering naught save the poor sufferer, and the stricken family, a low cry burst from Levare's lips:

"God, save her!"

* * * * * * * * * *

"There is no God," the foolish saith,
But none, "There is no sorrow;"
And nature oft the cry of faith
In bitter need would borrow.
Eyes which the preacher could not school,
By wayside graves are raised;
And lips say, "God be pitiful!"

That ne'er said, "God be praised!"
Be pitiful, O God!

Five minutes later Eloise made her way to Mrs. Nevarro's room. "My dear Mrs. Nevarro," she said, "do not weep. Lillian is not dead, she has rallied and the doctors say there is a decided improvement. It is almost a miracle that has been wrought out before our very eyes," she went on, taking the hand of Earle and his mother in each of her own; "for I assure you that we thought her beyond our care forever, when she suddenly showed signs of life. Then we worked hard, oh, so hard! all of us—praying all the time that she could revive, and thank God! she has done so."

"Thank God!" breathed the mother and son in unison. And then Eloise broke down too. She had born it bravely, but the inevitable reaction had come. Then for a few moments they wept together silently, the mysterious bond of human sympathy binding them to each other so strongly.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BETROTHAL.

"Be still, sad heart! and cease repining,
Behind the clouds is the sun still shining;
Thy fate is the common fate of all,
Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary."

—*Longfellow.*

It was now the first of March. Our friends were again in their city homes. Lillian was convalescent; though she had not yet left her room. The sun shone bright and warm. From the housetops and neighboring trees came the joyful twitter of birds. Lillian sat by her window, drinking in the scene before her, as only those can who are recovering from a long tedious illness. On her finger there sparkled a brilliant diamond. She held it out before her now, regarding it with loving pride. She had worn it only a week, that slender circlet of gold—how much it meant to her! It was an emblem of their endless love. Serrell had written his proposal, for he could not bring himself to do otherwise. He felt that should he declare himself verbally, she would discover his real feelings. So he had written to her just before she came home; for Zida had said:

"If you love her, Serrell, and mean to ask her to marry you why do you not do so at once? What is the use of procrastinating? Don't you see that the girl is eating her heart out about you?"

Yes, he had seen it, he had heard that which confirmed his fears from her own lips, though only Eloise and himself knew; and Zida did not know of what Lillian had confessed in the vagaries of delirium. Poor girl! He had unintentionally given her cause to think that he cared for her, and she should never know any better. Neither of them had been to blame; it remained for him to act the part of an honorable man, and to suffer in silence stoically and as a duty. Honor! It is usually a brief way of expressing unbearable self-sacrifice, and of relinquishing all that goes to make life sweet. Have you ever thought of how much that one word implies?

Just a week ago he had slipped this small ring upon her finger and had kissed her, though had she been less happy and absorbed she must have seen how abstracted and miserable he was, and that the kiss was cold and unloverlike.

"I used to fancy that you loved Eloise," she said, smiling happily and feeling that she was blest beyond the common lot of mortals. He evaded the question. "I once fancied that she loved you too, Serrell," she went on.

"You see you were mistaken," he answered in a hard, unnatural voice.

"I'm so happy, I'm afraid it is too good to last" she said somewhat sadly. "It is bliss beyond compare." A sudden wave of pity swept over

Levare's heart. "Are you indeed so happy Lillian?" he said, drawing her to him very tenderly, and wishing that he could love her—that he might return this passionate adoration. "It is not too good to last, dear," he went on, still holding her in his embrace; "it will last while we both live. I am thankful little girl that you are satisfied with me, unworthy though I am, and if I can make you happy I shall not have lived in vain."

So Lillian had accepted what she thought to be Serrell's love as a gift from God, and thanked Him for sparing her to all this happiness. Serrell passed to and from his downtown office as of yore. He was paler and a little more grave. He sent flowers and fruit to Lillian every day, and became an essential part of the girl's existence. He pitied her so; for did he not know what it meant to love and to not be loved in return? At least, he thought he knew. The night before he had gone to see Eloise. She was alone and received him in her study. She seemed pleased to see him, but as Serrell sat opposite her he imagined she looked pale and sad. She looked very sweet, though, and Levare was never more fully aware of the sacrifice he was making than now. He would have given the world to have been able to take this beautiful girl in his arms and to be able to protect her always, but he was bound to another, and honor forbade. All these fancies in which he so loved to indulge were but day dreams and after the manner of such they soon vanished, leaving their scars on the heart and brain of the dreamer.

"Eloise," he said suddenly. "You and I have

been laboring under a mistake." The girl looked searchingly into his face. He left his seat and stood before her.

"It doesn't make any difference to you," he went on bitterly, "but it has changed the current of my whole life, and marred my happiness forever." Eloise had risen too.

"You think I love Lillian," he continued with something of an effort, "and as matters now stand I wish to Heaven that such were the case; it would be much better for me, if I could." He took a step nearer her. She felt her heart beat rapidly, and then it seemed suddenly to stand still. "The pity of it is," he said sadly, "is that I do not. I have cared for but one woman, and had you been more worldly-wise Eloise, you would have discovered who that is long ago."

She did not speak, and he went on.

"But dear," taking her hands which were crossed passively before her, "I have always thought that you were not like other women, and I still believe it. I presume that is the reason I love you so. Yes—" as she held up an imploring hand—"you. This is the last time I shall ever address you in this strain, so please listen to me. It is altogether too late, I'll admit, but still I am determined that you shall know how I feel toward you. It can do no harm and will relieve my feelings somewhat. I have loved you ever since I first saw you. I took an interest in you from the first. Do you remember how I used to hover around you when you went to school?" he asked, and a sad smile rested for an instant upon his lips. "I thought you the most divine creature I

ever saw, and I still think so, Eloise. Zida always told me that it was you and not Jack that proved such an attraction for me in the old days on South Street. I never knew how much I did care for you until I went off. I passed the old place yesterday, Eloise, and you can't imagine how it brought back old times to me."

"Yes, Serrell," she answered, and her eyes were full of tears, "that is the dearest spot on earth. I once thought I would be happier away from there, but I have lived to learn my mistake. The memories which cluster around that dear old place are so sweet they are almost painful. It was there that mother and dear little Hugh died, and that renders it sacred to me; and oh, I wish, I wish we could live those happy days over, Serrell!"

He drew her to him saying tenderly: "Dear heart, I wish it too. I wish to God that neither of us had ever grown out of them. If we could have foreseen the course of future events we might have escaped all this. We were both ambitious, and though we have in a measure attained the goal of our ambition it has been our undoing. Hush, Eloise," he said, while his face was drawn and ashen pale, "do not weep; you make it so much harder for me. We must turn from the what might have been to the what is to be. I am going to marry Lillian, not for love, but because she cares for me very much. You can't imagine how much I suffered when this revelation came to me. You remember that evening she was so ill? You remember what she said, and that you asked me to speak to her? I couldn't do it,

Eloise; I would have broken down. I suffered the pangs of hell—" He broke off suddenly. "Let that pass," he said bitterly; "it is too cruel to remember, I shall never love anyone but you; and I cannot live near you and be with you, and have you believe me indifferent to you as to the rest. It will all be for appearance sake, dear, remember. I think I will not live here afterwards. I have thought it all over, and I have decided I cannot live a lie. It will be better for us both, don't you think?"

There was a deep bitterness at the girl's heart. Why was it that she had to give up everything? Happiness always came just near enough for her to imagine but never realize. Serrell was trying to steel his heart to the inevitable, but all the while he was wondering how he was going to give her up. Never to meet again except as friends. His brain reeled—his heart beat almost to suffocation.

"In after years when you are happy with Nevarro," he said, while his heart was breaking, "think of me sometimes, and pity me."

"Oh, don't, Serrell!" the girl broke out with a sharp cry. "I shall never marry; and I shall never forget you. You have been so kind to me and to my little angel brother. I shall never forget you. Why do you say such cruel things to me. You know that I can't forget you even if I wished to do so. God bless you for what you have been to me, Serrell. I hope you may be happy some day. As for me there is no such thing possible."

She drew her hands from his clasp, and resting her arms upon the mantel, hid her face upon

them and burst into passionate weeping. Levare stood watching her; his face was painfully drawn—his emotions were in a tumult. Her words had verified his suspicions. She loved him! Oh, agony! He had thought it hard enough to give her up before this knowledge was his, but now— He took a quick step toward her. "Eloise," he cried, passionately, drawing her to him, "Eloise, answer me truthfully; your confidence shall not be abused. You know I love you far too dearly to ever expose your secret—answer me. If this thing had never happened could you have loved me enough to be my wife? Tell me, Eloise."

But she turned away from him.

"Leave me, Serrell," she said brokenly, while with one hand she essayed to keep him at a distance. "If you love me, leave me!"

Too late he knew that she loved him! Ah, well! Most of the good things of life come to us too late!

"Leave me, Serrell," she pleaded, raising two tear-dimmed eyes to his. "Why prolong this agony? You are breaking my heart unnecessarily."

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Lillian and Serrell were to be married in June, and it was now the first of April. They intended traveling afterwards, for the physicians recommended a change for Lillian. She had had a cough ever since her illness. She now took daily drives, and as the days went by some of her old vivacity came back to her. She was very happy, for she was now Serrell's promised

bride. One evening as Levare sat in his office a small boy handed him a note, and hurriedly opening it he read:

"'Dear Serrell: Many thanks for the books and papers. If you have no engagement for this evening will you please come to see me?'"

The name of the woman he loved appeared beneath. Luckily he had no engagement, for it would certainly have been broken for once if such had been the case. He wondered much why she should have sent for him to-night. What would she say to him? A few moments later he went up the steps and rang the door-bell. Eloise admitted him herself.

"Come in, Serrell," she said, and her face showed her happiness at seeing him again. "Come into the sitting room."

He took a seat beside the open window, through which the perfume of the magnolia and jassamine drifted in. It was now the first of May, and the air was soft and balmy. She sat opposite him. Surely, thought Levare bitterly, as he watched her, Eloise must have tried her best to-night to see what a fool she could make of him—to tease him with vain hopes. She was a charming picture in her pale blue gown that fitted her perfect figure so faultlessly, and Levare reflected with exceeding bitterness that all this loveliness could never be for him.

"Lillian has been here to-day, Serrell," she said, at last. "Serrell, she is very, very happy, and oh, she loves you very, very dearly. I tremble to think if she should ever find out your real

feelings toward her. It would kill her if she should ever know how she has been——"

She breaks off and he substitutes:

"Deceived? Yes, Eloise; I am quite sure of that. If I had not been I would never have asked her to marry me."

"Do be careful," she said pleadingly. "Love is quick to see these things, and I know it would break her heart. She is such a fragile little creature; and her love for you is such an absorbing passion it is pitiful."

"Don't worry, dear, she shall never know."

"I know if you promise me," continued she, "you will keep your word."

There was absolute and painful silence for a moment; then Levare spoke.

"I suppose Lillian told you that we were going away immediately after our marriage."

He paused and began pacing the floor agitatedly—his hands were behind him, his eyes fixed upon the floor.

"She told me she thought you and Earle would be married on the same day and accompany us. She loves you next to me, Eloise. She has been strongly attached to you ever since you nursed her through that serious illness; and she would not object in the least to a third party so long as you were the one. She thinks it would be jolly to have you and Earle along. Poor girl!" he said compassionately, drawing one nervous hand across his lips. "She doesn't dream—she is so innocent."

"Yes," Eloise said, "she did try to persuade me to consent to marry Earle on the day that

you are married and accompany you on your tour; but we will not."

"I am glad that you are not going, dear," he said, "for that which affords us the greatest happiness under certain conditions becomes a torture under others. I'm afraid I could not keep my secret with you along. I have no right to dictate to you, Eloise. I am a selfish brute; but I had hoped that since I were not free to marry you, you would never marry. How fickle women are!"

Then seizing her hands suddenly, "Forgive me, Eloise—forgive me, dear. I didn't mean it. I am not myself any more. I have no right to criticise your actions. Marry Nevarro if you love him, and be happy. He is a good fellow."

"But I do not love him," she said, raising her truthful blue eyes to his, "and I shall never marry him."

"It would be better for us both if you could love him, and if you can do so, Eloise, do not remain single because you think it would please me. It will profit me nothing for you to remain unmarried. Perhaps some day when the wound is not so fresh we may live near each other and see each other often."

There was silence—a silence more eloquent than words. Levare spoke: "Eloise, I used to enjoy hearing you sing, in the old days when everything was so different. Will you sing for me?"

Ah! why did he mention that! Why did he refer to that dear, dead past beyond recall! Her heart was full enough, surely. She led the way

to the drawing room. A soft radiance enveloped her as she idly ran her fingers over the keys. It fell upon her fair face, lighting it up with an unearthly purity. He watched her in worshipful silence. His words had filled her soul with regretful, never-to-be-forgotten memories. Eloise had a charming voice. To-night she surpassed herself. She was singing to the man she loved; perhaps it would be the last time in life, and she felt inspired. The deep chords—surpassingly sweet and tender—echoed the cry of her life. It spoke to her of an eternal farewell, and touched across her soul like living fire. Suddenly that sweetly powerful voice, thrilling in its intensity, broke the stillness. It held Levare enthralled. It was an old song which we have all heard many times; and she had sung it for him years ago. It was a special favorite with him.

"Where are now the merry party
I remember long ago,
Gathered round the Christmas fires,
Brightened by their ruddy glow?
Or on summer's balmy evening
On the hill upon the hay?
They have all dispersed and wandered
Far away, far away.

"Some have gone to lands far distant,
And with strangers make their home;
Some upon a world of waters,
Evermore are forced to roam;
Some have gone from us forever,
Longer here they could not stay,

They have reached a fairer region,
Far away, far away.

"There are still a few remaining
Who remind us of the past;
But they change as all things here change,
Nothing in this world can last.
Years roll on and past forever,
What is coming, who can say?
Ere this passes many may be
Far away, far away."

The sweet voice died away in a low sob. She raised her eyes to his. He was leaning on the piano, looking down at her—a world of regret and longing in his fathomless dark eyes. Something in their gaze caused Eloise to lower her eyes. Neither of them will ever forget that night.

"Eloise," he said with suppressed passion, "it is not yet too late. It will be impossible for me to do this thing! My God, how can I live without you! Where is the honor in this? I confess I am unable to see it. Is it honorable to marry a woman whom I do not love? Is it honorable to live a lie? My darling, it is not yet too late," he said, forgetting himself and the world—everything except that this woman before him made up his existence. And this was good-bye! His spirit rose in revolt. The girl's lips trembled piteously. She felt it, too. It seemed that she had suddenly reached an impassable desert in her existence. "We can explain all to Lillian," he went on; "she will soon forget, while

you and I will never. My darling, we have but one life to live, and nothing can ever repay us for a life of unhappiness. I know you love me, Eloise; then why will you not listen to me?"

He caught her to his heart, murmuring passionate words of love; he pressed his burning lips to hers in an ecstacy of mingled bliss and anguish. Their responsive touch seemed to madden him.

"My love, my love," he went on, straining her to his heart, "why will you not save us from a lifelong misery? What creed are you following that bids you make of yourself a martyr to unhappiness? You are ruining your life and mine for a whim—merely such."

She lay in his embrace passively; her strength seemed suddenly to have left her. Poor Eloise! Poor, weak, unhappy humanity! For an instant she wavered. How could she deny her starved heart the only happiness it had ever known? The woman whom this man was to marry had everything. She had nothing! She had loved him for years so fondly, and only for this! She rebelled at this freak of destiny. Heaven might have granted her this, her soul cried out in great bitterness. Realizing her utter helplessness while clasped in his arms, she said:

"This is horrible! Serrell, spare me! Then, bursting into tears:

"Ah, Heaven, let me die—let me die! I cannot live after this!"

Thinking that she was about to yield, Levare redoubled his pleading.

"Let us go, Eloise," he begged, pressing her

close to him, every nerve in his body tingling—his pulses and brain on fire. "I am strong enough to shield you from everything. You shall never be censured or blamed, and think of our future, dear one—how happy it will be! There is but one bliss," he continued, "one ecstacy—Love. I believe pure love such a holy thing that the man or woman who errs for love's sake should be forgiven much. It is a thing of divine origin; a thing which renders all conditions sacred. My darling I have tried all that renders life dear—fame, prosperity, popularity, satisfied ambition and love; and I declare to you that compared to the soul-thrilling ecstacy of mutual love all the others fade into pale insignificance. There is no life without love, dear heart—nothing worth living for."

"Don't Serrell," she breathed at last. "Let me go! You are not responsible for what you are saying and doing. To endure is more noble than to yield. You and I are strong enough to make the sacrifice, and we must make it. It would kill poor Lillian to lose you now, and then we should despise each other. Let us at least endeavor to retain our respect for each other."

"It is impossible," he answered, in a voice of utter weariness. "I cannot give you up."

But that which he could not resist, she nobly placed beyond his reach.

"You must," she said firmly, disengaging herself from his embrace. "I was mad just now to listen; but that is over. I am now quite calm; quite determined. Henceforth our pathways lie apart. You and I must never meet again alone,

Serrell; never again," she went on calmly, though her face was white as death. She had made a noble fight for honor, and she had conquered; but she dared not measure the consequences—she dared not count the cost of her victory, lest she should weaken.

"You said just now that I cared for you. You are right. Let that memory nerve you. Yes, I love you, Serrell—you can never understand how much; but it is too late. Nature is stronger than anything; and no matter how we may struggle to combat her natural impulses, they are bound to assert themselves. I believe that if two souls love truly they will recognize their affinity in another world, for naught but love can enter that realm of spirits. It is love that takes us there and it is love that constitutes and presupposes a Paradise. True love cannot die; it is of God, and God is Love. Perhaps in another world we may be permitted to enjoy that which is denied us here."

"Perhaps, dear heart," he said, "perhaps. We will do our duty, you and I, and trust God for the rest. Good-bye, my only love," he went on, taking both her hands. "Good-bye! For the sake of our love for each other, kiss me. It is for the last time."

She raised her pure face to his, and their lips met in a last, long, clinging kiss. One brief, blissful moment—a few hurried heart-beats, and it was over. He put her gently from him.

"When you plead, dear heart at the Throne of Grace, remember me. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Serrell."

"God bless you, Eloise!"

A moment more and she was alone. She stood listening to his footsteps as he went down the steps and out into the street. Then realizing that this was indeed the end—that he had passed out of her life forever, she groped for a moment blindly, and throwing up her hands, fell prone on the floor.

* * * * * * * * * *

He walked on down the street. The soft, May wind fanned his fevered face, yet he felt that he was choking. It was over. They would never meet again alone; they had pledged themselves to that. His head was bent—his thoughts were chaos. He had a mad, unreasonable desire to leave the world—to lose consciousness to this pain that was consuming him. The town clock struck twelve. It fell upon his ears like the knell of doom. He walked on past the gloomy cathedral, whose dark towers loomed above him like warning fingers pointing heavenward. He knew not whither he was going; he cared not. The myriad stars twinkled in silent sympathy to all those who suffer from whatever cause. He entered a street which led toward the river, a street seldom frequented by such as he, and rude jests, oaths and obscene songs floated out upon the still night air. He had left the street lights behind him. In the broad, calm sheet of the river his figure was reflected a moment, standing irresolute. Beneath its broad bosom there was rest—rest from the unbearable sorrows of life. But no. He could not do that. That was for women.

Something bright glittered in the soft moon-

light—something cold and glistening was pressed against his temple, and for one brief, terrible moment a momentous, all important, vitally-frought question presented itself to him. Serrell Levare was not a Christian; but he felt just then what most of us have felt in the most trying moments of our lives when such harrowing suggestions have presented themselves—he was afraid that death as we know it, is not an end to life. He was afraid to risk it. Standing there with this awful temptation before him the sweet, reproachful, sorrowing face of the woman he loved rose like an apparition before him. The glistening piece was hastily concealed. A feeling of shame took possession of him. Was he weaker than a woman? Poor little Eloise! How her heart would bleed if she could but know! She would face life bravely. Should he do otherwise? Then his thoughts reverted to the woman who loved him and whom he did not love. What a bitter blow it would be to her love and pride to know that he preferred death rather than face life with her.

He sat down near the water's edge and buried his face in his hands. He was too weak to go back yet. The struggle he had just endured rendered him incapable of action. It had been terrible, and the reaction was but inevitable.

* * * * * * * * * *

A few nights after this the front door of the Venarez residence opened to admit a young man, dressed in the height of fashion, who seemed quite sure of his welcome. The maid paused at the door and announced:

"Mr. Nevarro." Earle came quickly forward. "How are you, little girl?" he asked, taking her hands, and looking down into her face with a pleased smile. "All alone to-night?"

"No," she answers, leading him to a seat. "Jack is in his room. I have been reading."

He drew from his pocket a small velvet case, and opening it, displayed to her bewildered gaze a magnificent diamond ring. The girl checked the exclamation of delight that rose to her lips.

"Earle, why did you get it?" she asked. "It is not right that I should accept it, for I can never marry you."

"But you told me that I might hope," he persisted pleadingly. "You promised you would try, you know. Don't break my heart, Eloise."

He slipped it upon her reluctant finger eagerly. "Try to care for me, Eloise; won't you?"

"Yes, I will try Earle," she said. "I will indeed."

He raised her hand to his lips.

"I will have to be content with that, dear, I suppose. I can only wait and hope. It may come at last. I do not consider the time lost in waiting for you. No sacrifice I can make for your sake is too great."

Why could she not love this man? her rebellious heart questioned. He was good, handsome, rich; and he loved her devotedly. Why would not Heaven grant that her affections should turn to him since she had been denied the other?

It was quite eleven when Earle rose, saying he must go.

"Good night, sweetheart," he said, pressing her hands fondly. "Be a good little girl and think of me just as much as ever you can, and in my very best light always. Try not to see my faults, dear heart, and you may learn to care for me. That is all I ask of you; and my whole life will be spent in making yours one of happiness. I only ask that you let me prove my loyalty to you. Good-night!"

There was a moment's silence. . . . Then the door closed after him. Eloise was returning to the sitting room when Jack opened his room door and came out.

"Has he gone, old girl?" he asked.

"Stayed pretty late. Well," as his eyes lighted upon the new ring, "so it's a settled fact, is it? Good for you! That is the most sensible decision that I ever knew you to make. Did better than I thought you would; that's a fact. I fancied you were gone on Levare; but I see you've got an eye to business after all.

Jack tilted his chair back and sighed resignedly.

"I've got to get my girl something like that now very soon, I suppose."

He threw his head back and with half-closed eyes watched the blue rings of smoke curl upward from his lips.

"She has decided to fight it out with me for the rest of our natural lives. Congratulate me, old girl! I'm so specially happy I can't sleep."

The girl broke into a soft little laugh.

"Yes, I do congratulate you, Jack," she said warmly. "I always predicted that you two

would marry, you are so congenial. I hope you will come out all right in the fight. When did it happen?"

"Last night about half past twelve," he answered, blowing out a volume of smoke. "That is—the actual settlement of the question. We've been debating on the advisability of such a course for some time. In fact, we both experienced a change of heart several months ago. It's very indefinite, though," removing his cigar from his lips and gazing thoughtfully before him. "Of course, I can't take her as matters stand now. I'll have to wait until I am a little better off. Confound the luck! It looks as if that old creature out yonder never intends to give up the ghost!"

"Why, Jack," his sister said reproachfully. "Be ashamed of yourself!"

"No, I'm not, either," he flashed back unrepentantly. "She ought to be kind enough to give somebody else a chance now. Have you and Earle decided upon the day yet?"

"No," she answered, looking away from him.

"You haven't?" in much surprise.

"Well, what do you find to talk about so much then?"

"Just what you and Zida find to talk about so much."

"Well," said he, "if I were you I'd hurry up and get it over with. What's the use of putting it off?"

"Perhaps it's with him as with you," she said slowly; "he can't afford it."

"Pshaw!" returned he. "That won't work.

Nevarro can afford to keep a wife if any man can. He and Miss Lillian will be worth half a million at their mother's death. Old Levare knew which side of his bread was buttered," he went on, smiling. "I once fancied that he liked you pretty well, Eloise; but I guess he found out that there was nothing in that for him," he rattled on thoughtlessly, little knowing that his words cut his sister cruelly. "Wonder how the old folks will take to me? By Jove! That will be a pretty good deal for yours truly, too! It's awfully nice when a fellow is fortunate enough to get beauty and 'rocks' together. One isn't complete without the other. They've got but the one child, and of course she'll inherit it all."

CHAPTER XV.

THOSE WHOM GOD HATH JOINED!

"Like Dian's kiss: unasked, unsought.
Love gives itself, but is not bought."
* * * * * * * * * *
"No one is so accursed by fate,
No one so utterly desolate,
But some heart, though unknown,
Responds unto his own."

The wedding day dawned bright and clear. Lillian's maid was on her knees before her mistress, putting finishing touches to her toilet. Eloise and Zida in entrancing gowns of white silk and large white leghorn hats trimmed with ostrich tips, stood near, drawing on their gloves. Eloise was white and nervous; but the bride-elect was perfectly calm; her face was radiant, and her eyes shone like stars through the silken sheen of her snowy veil. She looked like a dream in her robe of ivory satin worked with pearls. She wore no ornaments except the diamonds her mother had given her and which were heirlooms. Mrs. Nevarro came up and kissed her.

"My darling," she said, "we must hurry a lit-

tle. It is almost twelve, and the carriages are waiting."

It was a charming wedding. Eloise was maid of honor and Earle was "best man." The "happy pair" stood under a gigantic evergreen horseshoe, suspended, from which was a floral cupid's bow and arrow. An invisible choir sang softly throughout the ceremony. Serrell was very pale, and his hand trembled visibly as he slipped upon his bride's finger the wedding ring. The minister had known them both from childhood, and when they knelt together to receive his benediction, he placed a hand on each bowed head and offered up a fervent petition to God that they might be always happy in each other's love. Eloise echoed the prayer silently. Then to the strains of the wedding march they came down the aisle. Before them went two little flower girls, strewing white roses. It was over. Lillian leaned back on her cushions. Her cup of happiness was full to overflowing. She had nothing more to desire. It seemed that she had lived all her life for this supreme moment of bliss. In Mrs. Nevarro's spacious drawing-room, Jack grasped Serrell's hand.

"It isn't so dreadful after all, is it?" he said jovially. "It might have been worse had it lasted longer."

But when it came Eloise's turn she embraced Lillian fondly, wishing her all happiness. She then took Serrell's hand silently and her brave, true eyes met his. He pressed her gloved hand warmly, and once again felt strong enough to face life.

* * *

Winter had come. Eloise sat in her cosy study, running her eyes over the *Times*, a tri-weekly paper. A bright fire burned in the grate, for the weather was bitterly cold, and outside the wind howled dismally. Suddenly laying the paper aside she fixed her gaze upon the dying embers before her. Long ago she remembered having made a vow that if fortune would but favor her, she would never forget to be generous. Fortune had been generous to her certainly; yet had she kept her word? One week before the following appeal had been printed in the *Times*:

"To All Christians:

"Christmas, the time of universal rejoicing and good will to men, draws on apace, and thousands of happy hearts are beating in joyous anticipation of what this season of gladness will bring to them. But while we are happy in these mercies that so richly surround us, we should not forget what this time should teach us. To some, Christmas is but a name. No token of love for the season's greetings will brighten their lives and gladden their empty hearts; and while we rejoice in God's mercies toward us let us not forget that He expects us to do our duty toward our less fortunate fellow-creatures. All those who feel that their hearts would feel lighter—that their happiness would be more complete in doing a real charity can do so by leaving contributions here, at my home, or at Mrs. Van Worth's. The funds will go to make a dinner—a genuine love feast—for the poor, in the city hall, on Christ-

mas day. Let us not be selfish in our own bountifulness."

And Eloise's signature appeared underneath. But somehow or other the people had been less generous than on previous occasions, whether from the unusually "hard times" or disinclination I cannot say, but Eloise, finding herself short of contributions, had swelled the funds from her own pocketbook, for she was a determined little soul, and she had quite set her heart on this "love feast" as she was wont to call the dinner she gave. Each participant was enriched by a gift of some kind—the outcome of her own generosity—and after dinner there was to be a dime entertainment for the benefit of those gathered. So everything went off very nicely, and Eloise did not reproach herself for not being present at Mrs. Van Worth's elaborately designed sociable; for since Serrell had passed out of that society she did not care for it herself. Earle was away from home on urgent business so he could not be present. So everything had gone on beautifully. Eloise passed among the crowd with a sweet smile on her beautiful face. She wore her habitual white, and she passed up and down the long table seeing that each and all were provided for, and everywhere she was greeted with smiles and blessings. After dinner the entertainment was given, and each child was presented with a package of fireworks; and it did her generous heart good to watch their small, pale faces light up with pleasure and anticipation. It was quite dark when they came out, and as Eloise stood on the top step, a small boy,

bolder, if not more appreciative, than the rest, threw his tattered cap into the air:

"Hurrah for Christmas and for the white angel!"

And the whole crowd joined in. This one act of kindness and noble generosity earned for Eloise, among that class, at least, the title of "the white angel."

"Eloise," Zida said that night as they stand on the veranda at Mr. Van Worth's, "you've made quite a name for yourself by your writings and have started off nicely if you don't go and spoil it all by indulging philanthropic ideas. Who would have thought of your staying housed up all day and half the night with that crowd of street urchins?"

Eloise gave a peculiar little cough.

"It seems, my dear Zida, that I must have thought of it, judging from subsequent events. We are taught that a bond of sympathy should bind us in heart to these poor unfortunates; and even the street urchins have hearts and are human. I cannot enjoy myself knowing that there are those all around me who are suffering for the bare necessaries of life. It takes so little from us and it means so much to them. I thank Heaven that I have within my heart a warm, sympathetic spot for my fellow-creatures."

At this moment Jack came to the door. He had been inside talking to Mr. Van Worth, who was too much indisposed to be out.

"Well," said Zida, turning to him, "have you come out to see the display?"

"Oh, fireworks!" he said contemptuously. "I

expect to see enough of that hereafter! I came to see what you all were talking about."

"Dear little girl," Earle said an hour later, as they stand in the Venarez sitting-room together, "I'm so glad it was a success. I have just returned and have heard all about it."

"Yes," she said, "and had it not been for you, Earle, I could not have carried out my plans at all."

"Dear little woman—dear little sweetheart," he went on softly, holding her hands and gazing tenderly down into her eyes. "When you are my wife, Eloise, you shall indulge your charitable inclinations as much as ever you will."

CHAPTER XVI.

AN UNFORTUNATE ATTACHMENT.

Eloise heard from Lillian regularly. They were then in Florida. Lillian's health had not improved, and her cough was worse. The doctor had told Serrell that she must not spend the winter in Washington. So they were now at Tampa Bay. She wrote her, too, that she was trying her best to improve, for she wanted to come home on a visit. Serrell was not looking well, either, and he worked so hard, poor fellow! all on her account. He would not consent to carry her to any more incongenial climate until spring.

"I'm such an expense to the poor boy, Eloise," she wrote, "and have been ever since we were married. I tell him he has reason to regret marrying me. He is so kind—so gentle and loving always. I want nothing else in the world—he makes up my existence, and despite my continued indisposition we are very, very happy."

Eloise's eyes filled with tears. Poor Lillian! Was it possible that she would be taken from all this happiness so soon? So they were coming home in April, and Mrs. Nevarro was busy putting things in readiness to receive them. Eloise had written another book. Someone far away

had read the book, and the same "someone" had written her his congratulations. Eloise always received a kind of grim satisfaction from Lillian's letters. They had come from Serrell. Possibly he had mailed them. That night in her own room Eloise sat reading a paper from Tampa, giving Serrell's wonderful speech on Cuba, which had created quite a sensation. She closed her eyes a moment and imagined she saw that commanding figure—the one she had loved, and alas! still loved so well—standing apart from the rest and commanding profound attention by the sheer force of his argument, and the magnetic influence of his grave, dark eyes. No man could listen to Serrell Levare and look into his frank eyes and doubt him. She knew their magnetic influence far too well for her own comfort. She remembered his words concerning her first book. So many beautiful sentiments and grand utterances in the speech made her think of him. She treasured his words concerning her book in her heart still. They had spurred her on to greater effort. Serrell was not like most men. He always thought more of the pleasures of others than of his own. All men seemed shallow to her as compared to him. She might have loved Earle and been happy, she told herself bitterly, had it not been that she cared for him. She little thought that he was rushing madly into politics as a solace for his wounded affections. Her heart beat high when she thought of seeing him so soon, and she reproached herself bitterly for caring so much.

"It is a sin," she said with a sense of humiliation. "I wish it could be otherwise."

Then suddenly she rose and began pacing up and down in a manner greatly agitated.

"No, no; the memory of my love for him is too bitter-sweet. I cannot forget, and oh, despite the fact that he belongs to another—that it is sinning to care for him, I could not live if I knew he did not care for me! Oh, my love, my love! Be true to me in spite of all. Oh, Serell, Serrell!"

She clasped her hands in agony, and the tears flowed freely down her cheeks and fell on the carpet at her feet. A few moments passed thus, then she dropped on her knees and raised her face in agony.

"Lord, if it be possible," she moaned in anguish of spirit, "let this pass! It is all wormwood—all!"

Someone rang the door bell, but she did not hear. A moment later there came a knock at her door. The girl sprang to her feet and hastily brushed away her tears. The next moment Nevarro appeared smiling radiantly. The smile died, however, as she stood aside for him to enter, and a look of tender, anxious concern crept into his eyes.

"Why, Eloise—why my little girl; what's the matter? Have you heard bad news?"

She shook her head dolefully.

"Then what is it, my dear," he said, drawing her tenderly toward him. "You have been crying."

"I don't know, Earle. I feel so lonely—so forsaken."

A peculiarly helpless, hopeless expression passed over his face. He pressed her hand tenderly.

"Can I never fill the void in your life, my Eloise? It seems too hard that you cannot love me. I could kill the scoundrel who has won your heart only to break it. Who is he, Eloise? He is a fool, a blind hard-hearted, soulless reprobate, or he would love you. Great God, little girl, what manner of man could resist you? You of all women! Tell me his name and I will challenge him. The wretch! Do I know him, Eloise?"

"Please do not put such questions to me," she said. "I cannot answer you, Earle."

"Then for God's sake don't ever tell me that you feel lonely and forsaken again. Heaven knows I've done all I could. You won't let me comfort you. I cannot tell you how miserable the knowledge of your unhappiness makes me. I would gladly die to save you a pang, oh, Eloise; and yet I am powerless to help you. My darling, pity me! If I did not think I could make you happy, I would not insist. Let me teach you to forget that brute, dear, whoever he may be. Go with me now. I want you."

She drew from her finger the sparkling diamond and held it out to him—a pitiful, pleading look in her eyes.

"Take it, Earle," she pleaded. "I have tried and failed. I do not love you, and it is not right that I should keep the truth from you. Take it, and I pray that you may find someone to wear it more worthy than I."

Nevarro rose to his feet, white as death.

"You don't mean that, Eloise," he said hoarsely. "My darling, speak! Your jest is cruel!"

"Nay, I am not jesting, Earle," she said sadly. "I have tried, but it is impossible."

"Then why?" he questioned passionately. "Why? I know I'm no saint, Eloise, but I'm not an ogre, am I? What is there in my make-up that is so abhorrent to you? Why is your nature so antagonistic to mine? Dear heart, let not false modesty stand between us and happiness. I have a past, but, believe me, it is indeed a past. All men have a past; but such associations a real man forgets. Some women are made to save us. Others are made to drag us down to perdition. You know that, do you not? The latter sort I have left forever if you will but prove true to me. I am disgusted with my past life, Eloise. No matter how reckless a life we may lead for a few years, the reaction is apt to come, sooner or later, for life is no jest. It remains with you to make or mar me, Eloise. It is for you to say. The longing for a woman's companionship is so strong within me that I cannot much longer deny myself that consolation. Women have been a very evil influence in my life thus far, but I feel sure that if you cast me aside I will have reason to blush for my future career. What am I saying to you? You innocent child! Eloise, save me from myself, I pray you! I am ashamed, thoroughly humiliated that I am confessing facts; but we are all creatures in the hands of an inexplicable and relentless destiny. My life is so empty without you, I fear if you do not con-

sent to become my wife—the savior of my morals —I will be tempted to assume a relationship less binding with some one less conscientious. I know that your pure soul revolts from such thoughts as these, but such things exist, and if this is the reason you are sending me from you, I must tell you that you will never improve upon me in that respect. Do not be instrumental in my downfall, little woman, for I shall not always live alone, and I shall never offer another woman my name."

"I would not be afraid to trust you, Earle," she answered truthfully, "if I could only love you. I have perfect confidence in you; but I could not do you nor myself the injustice of marrying you when I do not love you."

There was absolute silence in which only the musical tick of the small clock broke the stillness. Nevarro leaned heavily on the mantle.

"I cannot take the ring," he said, and his strong voice broke. "If you cannot keep it as my betrothed, then keep it as a constant reminder of my unwavering devotion. Keep it as the gift of one who adores you and you alone and forever. I could not keep it. It would always be a reminder of what I had hoped would one day be mine—of the time when I imagined the day when my life would be blessed like that of other men. I assure you no other woman shall ever wear it. The associations that cluster around that ring are too sacred to be desecrated that way. It belongs to a dead past. Keep it, and in after years when another takes its place keep

it still in remembrance of one whose heart you have broken by sending him away."

"Hush, Earle!" she sobbed. "No other shall ever take its place. Dear Earle, I have tried so hard—so hard and I have failed."

She clasped her hands over his.

"Earle, I want you to feel that I have your welfare at heart always; that if you should come to grief I would suffer because of it. I have always liked you, Earle, very, very much. I think that I understand you better than any one, perhaps, and as I have no other interest in life I mean to see that you keep out of trouble."

Remembering his words, she became desperately in earnest.

"If I cannot love you in the way you ask surely you will not deny me your friendship. I shall die unmarried, Earle, and I want you to remember that I shall make it the work of my life to see you happy—to atone to you for the pain I have unintentionally caused you. Earle, surely I have suffered sufficiently without being made to feel that I am in any way responsible for anything rash that you may do. I cannot let you leave me until you promise me that you will do nothing rash. It would kill me."

"If your God is just why does he let you suffer so?" he said at last.

"I cannot say. Some people never know what happiness means. I am one of them."

"And I another," he said. "I am the most unhappy, accursed mortal breathing. I wish to God I had never been born!"

He turned away to hide his face. For a mo-

ment silence reigned. Then seizing her hands he covered them with kisses.

"Dear one, is it farewell?" he said brokenly. "Farewell to my life's fondest hopes and aspirations? Out of pity for me, Eloise, will you not let me take you in my arms once—just once, and kiss you? It can be no harm, and I have longed to kiss you so long! Will you not, dear heart?"

"Promise me," she said, "that you will be the same—that you will not change? It would break my heart if anything evil should befall you."

"For your sweet sake," he said earnestly, "I will try to be a man. You will still permit me to come, and under the spell of your influence I can do nothing unworthy, surely. I will do my best, anyway. I can never forget that you deemed me worthy to be your betrothed husband, even though you could not love me. The memory of that will hallow my whole life. Farewell, Eloise. If we live for twenty years and you should change your mind remember I will be glad of you even then. You will not kiss me? Then, dear, I will not insist, though it is bitterly hard for me."

He stood up, for the front door had opened noisily, and some one was coming down the hall with quick, heavy footsteps. Eloise had risen, too, and they stood expectant, waiting. A moment later the door opened and Jack stuck his head inside.

"Nevarro," he said in a voice strangely suppressed, "come to Mrs. Van Worth at once. Your uncle has shot himself!"

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTERWARDS!

"Let our unceasing, earnest prayer
Be, too, for light—for strength to bear
Our portion of the weight of care
That crushes into dumb despair
One-half the human race. . . . "

* * * * * * * *

"Bell! thou soundest mournfully
Tellest thou the bitter
Parting hath gone by."

—*Selected.*

It was now June—beautiful, sunny, smiling. Just one year since Lillian and Serrell were married. They were expected home momentarily. They had intended coming two months before, but the state of Lillian's health would not permit. Mrs. Nevarro moved from room to room, putting things in readiness for her daughter's arrival. The long windows were open and the fragrant zephyrs blew into the rooms. In Lillian's boudoir a delicate porcelain jardiniere filled with the waxen flowers of the tube rose, stood in one corner. Lillian was so fond of them. The rich velvet carpet had been removed some time ago and a pretty Japanese matting had taken

its place. Fresh, cut flowers were everywhere. A bright, happy smile of expectation lingered on Mrs. Nevarro's lips. Mrs. Van and Zida were present to receive them, too. Time had made great changes in Mrs. Van Worth's and Zida's lives. Mr. Van Worth had been dead a month. Unable to face life in his altered position, he, like many others, suffering from a similar cause, had ended his career. For a long time the change had been inevitable, though the wife and daughter had been kept in blissful ignorance of the fact—and when, as a result of reckless speculation, it had come, he had been unable to bear it, with the sad result of self-destruction. Earle Nevarro was now sole owner of the business. Mrs. Van and Zida still remained at their old home, though there was no income, and Mrs. Van looked gloomily forward to the time when they might have to move into less pretentious quarters. It was a very forlorn little figure that moved about the beautiful and once happy home, now so strangely sad and quiet; and the piquant, pretty face usually so gay, surmounted by its crop of curly red hair, looked strangely out of place in its adornments of sombre black. It was a sad little face, for in spite of her frivolity Zida was very fond of her dead father, and mourned his loss deeply. It had all been so sudden—so horrible at first she could not realize it. He had been in his usual spirits that night, and had sat up joking with the family and Jack Venarez until eleven that sad night one month ago, when he retired to his room from whence he was carried out a corpse.

He had been in his room only a few moments when the deed was accomplished, and upon forcing the door open the horrified investigators had found him lying across his bed, not undressed; a bullet hole in his temple, and a smoking revolver clutched in his stiffening fingers. Death had been instantaneous. As the days went by the bitter realization came, and it had its effect upon her life. Now it was a very common occurrence to find her proud mother in tears, and often they wept together. Eloise came every day, and Zida grew to think life would be impossible without these visits. The beautiful horses had been sold. All this was very galling to Mrs. Van's proud, sensitive nature, and Zida sometimes wondered if her mother were not grieving more for the loss of luxury than for her dead father. To-day she was sadder than usual, so Zida had strolled out upon the lawn with a book. The book was evidently uninteresting, for her ringless hands were crossed listlessly before her; her eyes gazed into vacancy. There had been a lovers' quarrel, and Jack had not been to see her for a week. The society that had seemed so incomplete without her before her misfortune, had, after the first few days of crushing sorrow, not bothered her with their attentions. A moment later Earle had come into the yard and had taken a seat beside her.

"My little cousin, you have been crying again," he said, tenderly taking one of the small hands in his own. "Are you, indeed, so unhappy, Zida?"

"I am miserable," she said, in a quiet, resigned

way, which went to his heart, "utterly miserable."

Nevarro regarded her a moment in silence. What had come between her and Jack? Did he really care for her, or had he only had her supposed wealth in view when he pretended to love her? Now that they had lost everything had he forsaken her? Earle ground his teeth and inwardly muttered a curse. He did not know of the quarrel, and he imagined miserably that he had forsaken her and that she was grieving herself into a shadow about him.

"Zida," he said, after pondering long and deeply, "my life is empty, too. Do you think you could be any happier if you were my wife? You would then live in your wonted luxury, you know; your every wish should be gratified. Dear little girl, it is needless to tell you that I have no heart to offer you. I gave that to someone else long ago—to someone who would not accept it; but Zida," very tenderly, "I am very, very fond of you, and if you will but give me the right to care for you, you shall never regret it."

But poor Zida! Her heart was too full. She burst into tears and left him. Mrs. Van Worth had witnessed the little scene from her window and that night at the tea table she questioned Zida what her cousin had been saying to her. The poor child was too miserable for an untruth just then, so she told her mother in few words that he had proposed to her. Mrs. Van's heart gave a great bound. She had been wishing for this always.

"Of course you accepted him, Zida," she said,

smiling amiably. "My dear, it was so sensible of you," she went on. "When you are Earle's wife we can live in all our former splendor. I am really proud of you! There is no better catch in the country. Earle is such a splendid fellow, and will make you an ideal husband."

Zida swallowed hard. She glanced into her mother's beaming face imploringly.

"No, mamma," she answered. "I did not accept him. I do not love Earle in that way."

"Love!" sneered Mrs. Van, contemptuously. "Love indeed! Those of our caste leave that to plebeians. It is quite out of fashion to marry for love nowadays."

"I could not marry Earle, mamma," she went on, pleadingly. "I have promised to marry Jack Venarez."

Mrs. Van colored wrathfully.

"Don't be a fool, Zida," she said, losing patience. There was so much at stake now and it all depended upon Zida acting sensibly. "You cannot afford to act so unwisely. Jack Venarez is not able to keep a wife, and he may never be. You have been too tenderly reared to become the wife of such a man. He may have to wait for that legacy that he is expecting, for years. I don't see why you cannot care for Earle. Heaven knows he is far superior to the other one."

"But I love Jack so much, mamma," the girl falters; "you can never know how much. Would you have given papa up for another man?"

"That is quite different," Mrs. Van said. "Your father was able to keep me in luxury. No man has any right to ask a woman to marry him

unless he is able to better her condition; or at least, unless he is prepared to keep her in as much comfort as she has been accustomed to. Think of the home Earle will give you! Really, Zida, you are to be envied."

"Mamma," the girl persisted, "I'd rather live with Jack in a cabin than with Earle in a palace. It would be horrible to be married to a man whom I did not love. It would be doing Earle a great injustice were I to marry him, loving Jack as I do."

"Don't mention love to me again," Mrs. Van said. "I am sick of the word. It is not the only thing to be considered. Love and poverty do not go well together. You don't know what you are doing."

Zida did not reply, and Mrs. Van suddenly changed her tactics.

"Then do as you please," she said, "but remember if you ever have cause to regret it that I warned you. I do not believe Jack Venarez capable of an abiding love. 'A new broom sweeps clean,' but when the novelty has worn off, as it certainly will, you will learn that you have sold yourself very cheaply. With Earle it would be different. Honor would keep him true and differential to his wife, even when the first glamour of passion had worn off. Ah, Zida, you don't know anything about poverty! I don't know what is to become of me. After all I've done for you, this is my reward. Earle would be kind to me. I could not live with you and Jack Venarez, and I never will. After all my

love for you you will not make this one sacrifice for me."

And she burst into tears. Where her mother's anger had failed to move Zida her tears succeeded. She twined her arms around her mother's neck.

"Hush, mamma! It shall be as you wish," she said, resignedly. "If by becoming Earle's wife I can make you any happier, it shall be so."

Mrs. Van drew her daughter down on her lap.

"You will see where I have been right some day," she said. "Good-night, Zida," she said, kissing her. "You have acted the part of an obedient child, and Heaven always blesses such."

That night Zida's pillow was drenched with tears. Mrs. Van crept to the door and stood noiselessly listening. The deep, heart-broken sobs reached her ear, and for one moment her heart was touched. But the love of wealth and display outweighed her desire for her child's happiness; and she stole softly to her own room without speaking. There was a bitter parting between Zida and Jack the next day. In spite of all her tears and explanations he had denounced her as a coquette! While her heart was breaking he told her in bitterness of spirit that she had led him on merely to see what a fool she could make of him—that he never expected to look upon her face again, and that she who had been so base would never be happy—that she had ruined his life and sent him to the bad. The girl clung to his arm despairingly, pleading with him to listen to her—that he was breaking her

heart; that though she would be Earle's wife her heart would always be his own; and perhaps in the future she might be free to love him. But all this stung the young man to the quick. He turned on his heel and shook off the hand that rested imploringly upon his arm, vowing that he would "never marry any man's old widow"—that "if Earle Nevarro died within ten minutes after they were married he would not have her."

Now all this was not very romantic surely; but as this story is not altogether fictitious, but is taken partly from real life, those were the poor fellow's sentiments exactly, for in spite of all the love stories we read of rejected lovers tearing their hair and committing suicide we seldom see that except in fiction. He had left her in spite of all her tears, without even saying "Good-bye," and twenty minutes later a young man stood in his own room hurriedly packing a large, brown valise and feeling all the while a burning desire to strangle a certain long-legged blonde young gentleman who was the source of all this trouble, and he secretly hoped a certain red haired young lady would suffer for all this. It was in this state that Eloise found him a moment later.

"Why, Jack," she asked in surprise, pausing in the doorway, "what is wrong?"

"Nothing specially," he answered, somewhat embarrassed, cramming an extra supply of ties and collars in, and pulling the straps across he buckled them nervously. "I'm just going off for a day or so for my health."

He looked up and forced a smile to his aid. She suspected at once that something was

wrong. Venarez straightened up and consulted his watch.

"I must be off; it's nearly train time. I won't be gone long, Eloise," kissing her. "You must not be lonely.'"

"What's the matter, Jack? Has Zida gone back on you?"

He turned from her and strode quickly across the room.

"Yes, confound her! She's played the flirt with me till she's made a complete ass of me, and now she tells me she is going to marry Earle Nevarro. I don't care what the devil becomes of her or myself, either!"

"Where do you think of going, Jack?" she presently inquired. "*Do* be a man. Do you think you are the only person in the world whose love affairs have turned out unfortunately? Are you going to let it floor you this way? Where are you going, anyway?"

"Oh, I'm not going to kill myself," he said, reassuringly, and with a forced smile; "neither am I going to cross the briny. I wouldn't flatter her that much. I'll not leave the state, and by George! since I come to think of it," putting the valise down savagely, "I've decided not to go at all! It would do her too much good, eh? No sir! I'll stay right here and smoke ten cent cigars and drink a gallon of lager beer right off the ice every day, and get fat. She'll never have the pleasure of telling Nevarro after they are married that that poor idiot of a Jack Venarez pined away and died, or left the state because she wouldn't marry him. I'll stay right here like a

hero and enjoy myself, and she and Nevarro may both go to the devil for all I care! Thank God, she's not the 'only pebble,' even if she does think so. She can't make a fool of me! If you will go on about your business, Eloise, I believe I'll take a nap."

This very irate young man pulled off his cap and stretched himself upon the couch.

"I wouldn't worry, Jack," his sister said, her hand on the door knob, as she turned to go, "for perhaps it is best after all. A man like you would not suit Zida; you should know that, and you are young yet."

"Sure!"

"I suspect it is best for both of you, tho' I like Zida very much. She and Earle will match admirably, for they are very congenial; and he can afford to humor all her whims, while you could not. You should consider all that."

"Hur!" grunted Jack, turning his face contemptuously to the wall. "I *have* considered it. Thank God, I saw my mistake in time! I just did escape. She almost had me!"

* * * * * * * * * *

"You must not condemn me, Eloise," said Earle Nevarro, on the day of the beginning of this chapter. "I knew if I remained single the rest of my life I could never hope to win you; and since that is the case I thought it didn't matter much what became of me. Zida was so miserable, and the poor child misses her former associations terribly. Upon my honor I did not know that she and Jack were engaged, or I certainly would not have interfered. She has ac-

cepted me. I felt sure after Uncle George died if Jack really loved her he would ask her to be his wife, and didn't know that he had already done so, so I asked her myself. I told her all, Eloise. I told her that my heart was not mine to give. I might have loved Zida had I never met you. When I learned the true state of affairs I promised to clear up things for them, but she confessed to me that she no longer loved Jack. Just a moment ago I saw him. He assured me that it mattered not—that he cared as little for Zida as she did for him. You can appreciate my situation. I cannot release her from the engagement unless she requests me to do so. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Earle," the girl replied. "You have done nothing for which to apologize. I hope you will be very happy together, and I'm sincerely glad you have made up your mind to marry. It is a sensible and highly commendable step, and I congratulate you."

An hour later a closed carriage stopped at Mrs. Nevarro's gate. It contained Lillian and Serrell. The poor mother almost swooned when she beheld the terrible change in her daughter's appearance. She had to be assisted to the house. Earle and Serrell almost carried her. Earle's face was white and set; Levare's exceedingly grave. They carried her to her room and placed her gently on the bed. She closed her eyes languidly. Serrell sat down beside her. Earle held a glass of brandy to her lips.

"Here, sister," he said, bending over her, "drink this; it will strengthen you."

Mrs. Nevarro, her face troubled and pale, sat near fanning her. Lillian had fallen into an unquiet sleep; but suddenly opening her eyes, with a faint smile, she said:

"If you all will leave me, I think I can sleep. I will call you if I want you."

They went out noiselessly. Outside the room Mrs. Nevarro burst into tears. "Oh, Serrell, why didn't you prepare me for this! My darling —my child! She will not live a week!"

Levare's face turned a shade paler.

"We were coming in April," he said in a low tone, "but the doctor told me she could not stand the journey. She improved somewhat, and we were to start a week ago; but on the night before she had a severe hemorrhage, and I was afraid to start with her. As soon as she rallied she wanted to come right away, and her physician said she could make the trip with safety. He came on the train with us, and Lillian talked to him very cheerfully. The trip has fatigued her more than I expected. He says we must be prepared for the worst. She is in the last stage of consumption."

Mrs. Nevarro's tears flowed afresh.

"You needn't tell me that," she wailed. "I can see it all too plainly. Oh, I wish you had never left me!"

"I have done all I could for her, Heaven knows. She would not have lasted this long if I had not taken her off last winter. She has had every attention, and the best physicians that could be had. We have all done all we could."

He turned and paced restlessly up and down

the hall. Mrs. Nevarro had fallen upon a couch and was sobbing convulsively.

A short time after a pretty girl opened the gate and went softly up the steps. She paused a moment at the door; but as soon as he saw her he came quickly forward and took her hand warmly.

"How are you, Eloise?" he asked. "I am glad to see you."

"How is she?" she said, eagerly. "I have just heard that you were here."

"Lillian is very ill," he said gravely. "She will never be any better, Eloise. Do not betray any surprise when you see her. She has changed very much, and she notices everything. Go in and see her."

She paused for a moment beside the bed. Mrs. Nevarro, Mrs. Van and Zida sat near, and the expression on the former's white face touched Eloise's heart. Just then Lillian opened her eyes. She held out her hands to Eloise with a glad cry. The other knelt down beside the bed and took her friend's head—that proud head so lowly laid!—upon her breast, and kissed her. A choking sensation was in her throat—a mist blurred her sight. She felt that she should say something expressive of her pleasure at seeing her again, but she could not; she could not have uttered a word to save her life.

"I'm so glad to see you, dear," Lillian said weakly, twining two pitifully emaciated arms around her neck. "How are you? Sit down and talk to me."

The girl complied in silence.

"I wish I could talk to you," she continued,

"but I am too weak."

"Yes, dear," Eloise answered.

The evening wore on. Lillian had fallen asleep. The attending physicians came in for the night. A bell in a distant belfry tolled mournfully. The sick woman roused herself and looked about the room.

"Serrell?" she called. "Where is he? I want him."

Someone went to the door and beckoned to Levare. He came in quickly, quietly; a frightened expression on his face. He came toward the bed and bent over her.

"What is it, Lillian?" he asked tenderly. "Did you call for me?"

"Yes," she said, "sit here," patting a place beside her. "I don't want you to leave me again."

He sat down and took one of her hands in his. Eloise sat near.

"Raise my head against your shoulder, Serrell," she said. "Now, that is all right."

She stole one thin arm around his neck and drew his head down to hers.

"Serrell, tell me," she urged, "what do they say? The doctors, I mean. Don't they say I can't last long?"

He was not prepared for this, and his face betrayed him. Eloise's lips were trembling.

"No, dear," he replied, "they say you will soon be better."

He did not look at her as he spoke, fearing lest she should guess the truth.

"Tell me the truth, Serrell," came that faint, pleading voice. "It is cruel to deceive me, and I shall not be frightened. I am not afraid to die. Look at me," laying her hand against his face and compelling him to look into her eyes. "I ask you for the truth. A knowledge of my condition will make me die no sooner. Didn't they say that I have not long to live? The truth, Serrell, please?"

God help him! This was the trying moment of his life. To the day of his death he will never forget it.

"Yes, Lillian," he answered hoarsely, "that is what they say."

She drew him to her still more closely, and held him there almost convulsively. She closed her eyes and two tears trickled slowly down her cheeks. The moonlight flooded the room, and for a moment there was absolute silence. Lillian opened her eyes.

"Let them all leave the room—the doctors and all," she said. "I shall not need them any more. Let them all leave; they are only waiting to see me die, and I cannot endure it. I want you, Serrell; Earle, Eloise, mamma, Aunt Anna and Zida. Please ask the others to leave the room."

They were shown into the adjoining room—a worldly company who could not enter the Valley of Death with their friend.

The city clock boomed the hour of nine.

"Now," she said, "turn the lights off, please. I want only the moonlight."

That was done. The small company sat down to keep their sad vigil.

"I wonder if I am not dying?" she asked suddenly, without fear, however. "I feel so strangely."

"No, Lillian," Serrell answered in a strange, unnatural voice; "you are not dying."

"I believe I am," she said, "but if this is death it is so different from what I expected. I suffer no pain. Do not weep, mother," suddenly, holding out one wasted hand to her. "I will not be dead. I will still be conscious and know and feel. I was afraid to die before; but I am changed. We have been very happy together, Serrell, have we not?"

His arms tightened around her.

"Yes, Lillian."

"After I am gone do not grieve for me. I wish it so. I am going to be very happy and I could not be if I could know you all were grieving."

Nevarro and his mother were sobbing aloud. Five minutes passed. The moonbeams flooded the room and fell across the dying girl's face with a weird, unearthly radiance.

"Serrell," she said weakly, "I know I am dying. No, do not call the others—please don't! Will you pray for me?"

"Oh, this is terrible!" Zida sobbed, and suddenly throwing up her hands she fell in a heap at Earle's feet.

"Poor child!" Lillian said compassionately, as they lifted her tenderly and bore her from the

room. "Keep her out of here, please. It is too much for her."

"Can I do anything for you, Lillian?" Serrell asked solicitously. "Pray for me," she said.

There was a moment of painful silence—a silence so intense they could hear her breathing.

"Dear heart," he answered brokenly; "do not ask me. Shall I send for a minister, Lillian?"

"No, no," she said; "please don't."

There was another moment's silence.

"Where is Eloise?" she asked suddenly.

"Here, Lillian," the girl said, coming forward; "here I am."

The blood rushed to her heart, and then receded, leaving her cold and chilly.

"You will not refuse me, Eloise," she said. "Will you not pray for me?"

Ah! woe for luckless, unbelieving humanity! When human aid has failed us what is our first impulse?

"Will you refuse me, too, dear?" she panted, breathlessly. "It is all you can do for me, Eloise, and I would be so glad. Do not ask that I be spared to life, but that I may have strength to die."

A great, dry sob broke involuntarily from the girl's lips.

She fell upon her knees beside the bed and buried her face in her hands. There was a deep and awful quiet for a moment. Then the sweet pleading voice broke the stillness:

"Merciful God——" her voice broke for a moment. Then she went on. "Thou who lovest the creatures of thy creation, we Thy benighted, suf-

fering children, come to Thee for light in times like these—in the darkest moments of our lives. When human aid has failed us we realize the need of Thee. We thank Thee, O God, that Thou hast assured us that we are never chastened in anger, but in love. Father, be with us now! Be with her whose spirit is leaving this earthly tenement—she who so much desires an assurance of Thy Divine Presence in this dark hour. Take her by the hand, Lord. Tell her that Thou, too, hast passed through it all and live again. Teach her that there is indeed no death—merely the passing of the immortal spirit from one existence to another; another more pure and exalted. Death is beautiful! Father, teach us to see it. Give her soul faith to trust all to Thee. Our God—Thou God of all love and all mercy! We who are but poor worms of the dust would help her if we could. Our love is as nothing compared to Thine. We yield her up to Thy keeping; receive her to thy loving bosom, where she will know no more pain nor sorrow nor tears nor bitter partings forever, but shall dwell in peace and joy unspeakable forevermore. Sanctify our loss to our soul's eternal good. Lord, we should be resigned, feeling that Thou must have loved her very dearly to call her thus early. Hear us Lord, we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen."

A pitiful, heart-broken wail issued from Mrs. Nevarro's white lips. Eloise rose and bent over Lillian. She was gone! A moment later the others came in. Eloise stood for a moment beside Serrell, looking at the calm dead face. He turned and walked hurriedly out of the room.

She looked so calm, so happy. In the solemn hush that followed, Eloise almost fancied that she heard the rushing sweep of angel's wings. She almost imagined that she heard the sound of heavenly music as the Golden Gate was swung open to admit another soul. She stood trying to realize that just one short moment ago those silent lips had spoken—those beautiful sightless eyes had looked upon them all. Now it was all over forever, and it was only dust that lay before them. Lillian's soul had passed:

"Into the land of the great Departed,
Into the Silent Land!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNFORTUNATE FRIEND.

A year has gone by. Zida and Earle have been quietly married. Serrell and Jack were away from home. The former had left shortly after his wife's death, and was now visiting friends and distant relatives in different parts of Virginia. Jack was "out West," for he had been a hero just as long as he could; but the flesh is very weak, and he felt that it would be a great temptation to see her every day and know that he could never make love to her as in the old days. So two weeks after her marriage he had taken himself out West in answer to a telegram stating that his maternal grandparent was not expected to live and desired his presence. When he arrived at his destination he found that she was dead, and that he was sole heir to fifty thousand dollars in money and real estate. It had come at last, he thought bitterly, but like most of the good things of life it had come too late. He converted the property into money, and immediately wrote Eloise a long letter, enclosing a check for five thousand. He was now roaming over the "Woolly West," whithersoever his fancy listed. Earle and Zida had moved into the magnificent brownstone residence, which he had

had erected, and Zida was now mistress of her own household.

Eloise still remained with Mrs. Maxcy for company. She was very much alone now, and she wrote a great deal. Her writing kept her from brooding over much. A letter which came by the evening post had plunged Eloise into a fit of depression. It was addressed in a delicate chirography, and bore the postmark of a distant city. She looked at it a moment; then drawing the closely written sheets forth, her eyes grew misty while she read:

"My Dear Eloise: Your letter has been forwarded to me from A——. The reason I did not answer your note is because since our paths have so widely severed, and my life has so changed, I didn't think you would care to claim me as an acquaintance, less still as a friend. "Yes, what you heard is quite true. I am Gerard Ballette's wife no longer, and therein lies a story which I am going to tell you now, if you will listen. I had not been married more than two months before I discovered that Gerard was growing away from me. I pray God you may never suffer what I did, Eloise, when this knowledge came to me. You know how I loved him and perhaps you can imagine what effect this had upon me. Suffice it to say that the world little knew of the lives we lived. People talked about my being so light-hearted, I may have appeared so; I was far from feeling what I seemed then. You know, Eloise, that I was too proud to suffer this separation without the gravest possible cause; so I suffered in silence, and

when the world thought I was so light-hearted my heart was broken. You remember that after a while people began to comment on Gerard's never accompanying me anywhere. I had begged him so often to go with me, but he always pleaded a previous engagement, and he would never break these engagements, even when he knew them as the price of my happiness. Then all my pride rose in revolt at his indifference, and my love died. Do not open your eyes so wide, Eloise, for I assure you, in spite of all protestations to the contrary, that real love can die. He won me by pretending to be what he is not; and when I learned how he had deceived me my respect for him died, and there can be no love with a woman like me where there is no respect—they are synoymous terms, you know. So I did not try to persuade him to change his course but once, for experience has taught me that when the path of duty is plainly pointed out to a man or woman, and they are made to see it, and yet will not abide by it, remonstrances are worse than useless. If they have not enough self-respect to try to conform to this, they are not worth the trouble of trying to convince them. Is not that true? But the night before I left him, I made up my mind that I would convince myself as to what the nature of these "binding engagements" were. So when he went out that night I followed, and soon discovered that my husband's life contained a chapter in which I played no part. The next day I told him that we could no longer live in any degree of happiness, and that it would be better for us to part. He must have thought I was jest-

ing, for he treated my words with contempt. But when he came in at noon and found that I had packed my trunk, he began to see that I meant to do as I had said. Then he was ridiculous. He said that without his consent no one would give me shelter under pain of penalty. Think of that, Eloise! That from a strong independent man to a helpless woman! He said that even if I did leave him as long as I was not divorced I would be subject to his commands. That reveals to you his real nature—the underlying meanness of his disposition. Yet all semblance of pride had not deserted him, for he did not wish me to leave him, though he cared nothing for me, he still had a slight regard for the world's opinion. Then how coarse he was! We had not a trait in common. Surely a more incongenial match was never made! But, Eloise, if he had only treated me with consideration—as though I had feeling; if he had only respected me even tho' his love were dead, I would have remained with him, so great was my dread of the publicity which a separation would naturally call forth. I wish to God I had not married him. But it is too late now. Why does Heaven allow an innocent confiding woman to be deceived?

"My first great disappointment came when I went to my aunt in my trouble and she turned coldly from me, saying I had disgraced her—that I was the first to bring shame upon an unstained and noble name. A man may treat his wife with less consideration than he would treat a dog, and yet if she goes for succor and protection to some of your so-called Christians, they

will tell her to go back to her husband and 'try to live right!' Live right, indeed! As tho' it were possible for a woman to live right with a beast. Then the law, that instrument of justice steps in and says: 'She is your wife—your chattel, more properly speaking; treat her as your brutal nature would suggest—you are the lord of creation, she is merely your slave, and the world is so uncharitable to divorced women that if she has one vestige of pride or self-respect she will suffer martyrdom rather than incur the displeasure of its scathing criticism and insulting insinuations.' Some women deem it more honorable to desecrate the marriage tie by remaining under their husband's roof, though they mutually loathe each other, than to come boldly out and denounce his utter worthlessness and show her contempt for him and for worldly criticism by obtaining a divorce. The honor which prompts us to live a perpetual lie is of a bogus consistency; and that which we call by that name today is the quality that forbids us to enjoy any of the sweets of life, and makes of us a living sacrifice. I do believe that if after death I am consigned to hell my eternity will be spent with a man whom I do not love—whose every action, taste and word is insufferably hateful to me; that I will be compelled to share his bed and submit to his loathsome caresses, and still be forced to wear a smile and pretend to enjoy it all in order to make His Satanic Majesty and his angels think me happy and respect me. That is the worst possible hell of which I can conceive—the extreme quintessence of supreme torture! Such

a life is degrading to any man or woman. It is moral suicide. It renders distasteful the most sacred relationship of life—ravishes every pure passion. Yet I have dared to do that which I deem the only truly honorable thing to be done under such conditions—seek relief in the divorce courts—and I have paid the penalty. From the multitude of friends which I once knew not one, save yourself, has deigned to write me a line, or to interest themselves in any way in my behalf. So much for your worldy friendships. Adversity or real sorrow always tries our friends, and they have proven that I have but one."

Eloise folded the letter and replaced it. Two big tears rolled slowly down her cheeks. Her life thus far had been a failure. Out of all her grand resolves no good had come. Ah, well! she would do the best she could. Heaven could expect no more of her. She had suspected that all was not well with Zida. She was no longer the light-hearted, careless creature as of yore. Earle, too, she fancied, seemed unhappy. They had been married half a year. That afternoon Zida and Earle called to see her.

"I had a letter from Serrell to-day," Earle said, after they had been talking a few moments.

"Really?" Eloise said, looking up quickly. "How and where is he?"

"In Richmond now and he speaks of coming home soon."

The girl was afraid that she had displayed too much interest, and her face was suffused with humiliating color. She let her gaze roam across the street, fearing to look at him then lest her

face should betray her secret. It seemed as if a leaden weight had been suddenly lifted from her heart. Zida was talking. Eloise heard, but did not catch her meaning; her words were without import to her. She raised her eyes and met those of Nevarro. In that brief instant she realized that her secret was no longer her own. Knowing this, there was a look of appeal in her eyes as her look met his. He comprehended and smiled. Zida was unaware of this wordless conversation. She presently stood up, saying it was time for them to go.

"Do not leave me," Eloise said, rising, too. "Stay and take tea with me. I shall be all alone, you know."

Zida readily acquiesced, saying as she did so, that she would go inside to play. Twilight was falling. Nevarro left his seat and took the one which Zida had just vacated.

"I have been very blind, Eloise," he said tenderly. "I might have seen this all along. That was the reason you could not care for me. I was completely thrown off my guard. I am very thankful that my sister never knew she was an unloved wife. That accounts for Levare's morbidness during the engagement. Looking back I can remember so many things to confirm it all. I was a blind fool not to see it. Poor fellow! Poor old boy!" musingly. "How he must have suffered! It will be all right yet, dear. You will be happy yet. Heaven always blesses people like you. It may be long in coming, but it will come at last, never fear. If I had led a different life, I, too, might have hoped. My destiny is ir-

revocably sealed. There is no happiness for me."

The girl made no reply to this sad admission. After a moment's pause he went on:

"You remember you said once that I ought to be happy? You surely cannot say that now, knowing, as you do, all my disappointments. I have been unfortunate from the start; that is, in matters of the heart," with the ghost of a smile; "and money alone was never known to fill an empty heart and life. Of late another sorrow has entered my life——"

He broke off as if the memory were too cruel.

"I will forbear to mention that I fear the world will know it soon enough."

There was a long silence after that. Something touched across the girl's heart, stinging like fire. It was quite dark now. From the drawing room Zida's voice reached them. She was singing a plaintive old love song—a song that in the old days she would have scorned—and Eloise never remembered having heard her sing with so much feeling before. It was a hopeless little air, with a sobbingly pathetic refrain. Earle heaved a quick sigh. A sudden fear came over Eloise. Was Zida beginning to see—alas, too late!—how unendurable a life without love can be? That night in her room Zida nervously paced the floor. Her hands were clasped before her convulsively, though she did not weep—she was too miserable for that. There is an agony so utterly hopeless that it will not admit of tears. In the stillness of midnight Earle Nevarro woke. He lay awake listening a while; then certain that something was wrong, he sprang out of bed and

made his way to his wife's room. He pushed the door open, and was startled at the white, agonized face which she raised to his.

"Why, Zida," he exclaimed in alarm, "how pale you are! What is the matter? Are you ill?"

"Oh, no," she almost cried, resting her head upon his shoulder; "it is nothing only my head hurts and I can't sleep."

"Why didn't you waken me?" very tenderly. "Would you let me sleep while you are suffering? Let me send for a physician?"

"No," she said, shaking her head; "I will be better soon. Go back to your room."

"Let me stay with you. Lie down and let me watch beside you."

"I don't want you to remain, Earle; I am not very ill, and I am going to lie down now. I think I can sleep."

He looked at her a moment silently; a pitiful expression of entreaty on his pale face. But finding that all persuasion was useless, he went out, closing the door behind him. Zida fell across her bed without undressing, and for an hour she moaned and sobbed unceasingly. Then exhausted, nature asserted itself, and she fell into a fitful slumber. In her dream she saw the face of the man she loved; his eyes were fixed upon her face reproachfully; they burned into her soul. That passed, and before her eyes there passed the glitter of gold, and she heard its empty jingle. The next day the mail contained a short, pathetic letter, blotted with tears. Love and Pride had had a fierce struggle for the mastery, and—Love had won!

Someone far away had read that letter, and had halted between two opinions, and "he who hesitates is lost" we know. The battle between right and wrong had been very brief. The outgoing Eastbound train saw Jack Venarez a passenger on his way home.

CHAPTER XIX.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

The week following the Nevarros were giving a reception. It was the first time since their marriage that the doors of their luxurious home had been thrown open for the entertainment of their friends. Zida, in a bewildering gown of white silk moved among her guests with a peculiarly uneasy, half-expectant, half-regretful expression on her pretty face. Earle stood apart from the others with his elbow propped upon the mantel. His eyes followed his wife with an expression pitiful in its regret. He felt intuitively that he could never fill the void in her heart and life; and the knowledge of this softened him toward her as nothing else could have done.

Time passed. Zida feeling a vague uneasiness, moved across to her husband's side. He looked down at her with a smile, which she returned mechanically; and knowing what it cost her, it hurt him more than her tears would have done.

"Are you not feeling well, little girl?" he asked solicitously, noting her peculiar nervousness, and extreme restlessness.

"Suppose you slip away and be quiet a few moments? I'm sure you will be excused."

"I was just going to tell you, Earle," she said,

"that I feel strangely, and my head hurts. If you do not mind I believe I will go to my room a few moments. I will not be missed and will soon return."

He pressed her hand silently, and she turned and made her way across the room, a miserable premonition of evil at her heart. Earle gazed after her in acute mental agony.

Poor little girl! It was slowly killing her; and yet he had tried to render himself dear to her in every way that he could think of. How long would she hold out?

As she was passing down the hall a servant accosted her.

"Here is a letter for you, madam," she said, bowing respectfully. "I was told to give it into your own hands."

She moved away, and Zida paused under the many-colored lights of the chandelier, and with fingers which trembled violently, drew the slip of paper forth and read:

"Zida: Come to me at once. I shall await you in the conservatory. Jack."

She put up one hand to her head in dismay, leaning weakly against the wall. She read the hastily scrawled lines again. Yes, it was true. Jack was there. What his mission was she could not trust herself to think. But he was near her. Thank God for that, at least! The blood rushed to her heart, in the unreasonably mad torrent of indescribable bliss which she felt at seeing him again. Then with the realization of the horrible sin that she might be tempted to commit, she felt weak and exhausted, and conflicting emotions

crowded upon her brain. She thought of the man she had left—the man who placed enough confidence in her to trust his honor to her keeping, and she glanced behind her like a guilty thing, and crushed the paper in her hands. Thinking of his perfect trust, for the moment she felt quite strong and fully able to act her honorable part; for nothing begets love and true respect like the knowledge that someone has faith in us and often times when one's inclinations are more or less evil one is led to act uprightly for the sake of that perfect trust reposed in one. On the other hand, there is nothing more calculated to urge one on to ruin, nothing more damning to morality, than to be watched and mistrusted by those who should trust us most; and the suspicious husband or wife makes a fatal mistake when he or she unthoughtedly adopts this policy. If one's habits are by nature a little wild, suspicion will but confirm them, while the creature who would be insensible to the sacred possession of perfect confidence must be base indeed. Zida passed through her own room and the soft, shaded glow of her lamp fell across her face and showed it resolute and determined. In spite of her love for Jack, she must send him away; nothing else remained for her. And yet! Heaven be merciful to her! She well knew her own weakness; and better still did she know the powerful influence which this man had over her. Once the thought occurred to her to send for Earle and confess all, beg his forgiveness, and ask him to send Jack away. Earle was so generous, so forgiving; she felt sure of his pardon. 'Twere

well for the young wife if she had decided upon this course; her good angel hovered very near at that moment. But feeling strong she threw a lace shawl over her bare shoulders and passing through the back corridor she entered the gardens, and then she paused irresolute. The man she loved was standing only a few yards from her; his hands were thrust deep into his pockets, and his eyes were bent upon the ground. In the bright moonlight his face looked troubled and old. Perhaps he was thinking of the irreparable wrong which he was about to do the man who had always been his friend. But usually when a woman is in the case friendship and all kindred attachments count for naught. He felt cowardly, low, contemptible! He owned to himself that he was a scoundrel, and cursed himself accordingly. Where were all his good resolutions —his honor? Where his boasted strength of will? In his all-absorbing adoration for this woman his will power was not worth a straw. The time had come to him as it comes to most of us when we either show ourselves a master or a victim of circumstances; when Passion makes of us either a master or a slave, and it found him a conscience-stricken and unwilling servant. How guilty he felt as he stood there! And yet there comes a time in most of our lives when conscience sleeps—when the one grand impulse of nature overrules all lesser virtues. Jack Venarez had come to that time now. If Earle Nevarro had come upon the scene then he would have shot him. And yet a better-hearted fellow never lived. There are some men who resist such temptations

as this—the cold, passionless kind to whom temptation is only a name—they have nothing to resist, they fight no battle and consequently win no victory—therefore their resistance is not owing to their strength of will, as we so often erroneously suppose, but rather owing to the fact that this one passion is not the predominating principle of their existence. Whenever this is the case we usually find that will power, pride, honor and good resolutions are quite overruled.

He was not aware of Zida's presence until she was near enough to touch him, had she so desired. Then he turned and grasped her outstretched hands eagerly. Their touch sent the blood surging through him like fire. The thought that he was a scoundrel forsook him. That the carrying out of his intentions meant the desecration of a home had no effect upon him now. He drew her forcibly to him, and for a moment neither of them spoke. Zida's good angel had flown. She was too weak to resist, so she lay in his embrace feeling that she could bravely face the world's contempt and scorn for the bliss of enjoying this man's love and caresses. Had she forbidden him to touch her she would have been safe. When the power and magnetism of personal contact is more thoroughly understood—especially as it exists between opposite sexes, a more guarded course of society will be adopted.

Zida's voice broke the stillness.

"Jack, why did you come?"

"Why did you send for me, Zida?"

After this first exchange of interrogative

greetings there was silence. They both seemed at a loss for words. Time was passing.

The guests had missed Zida, and Earle had pleaded for her sudden indisposition; yet he wondered why she did not return. He left the brilliant throng, his heart full of apprehension lest his wife were ill, and made his way to her room. . . . Zida and Jack were in the sitting-room.

"I came, Zida; yes," he was saying, "knowing full well that I should not have done so. I could not do otherwise. It is wrong, Zida, all wrong."

"I know it," she said, bursting into tears. "I know we will be punished for this, too; and yet, Jack, pity me; I couldn't help it! I am a wretch; but oh, I did not know when I married Earle that it would be so hard to live with a man whom I didn't love. He is so kind, so attentive; and to think I am deceiving him! It is torture! Yet how can I endure this life? His very touch is repulsive to me. It is a mistake to imagine that friendship or good fellowship can take the place of love. You don't know what I have suffered. You would pity me if you knew all. Don't look at me so, Jack; you are breaking my heart! Why didn't they save me from this?"

"You chose your own destiny," he said bitterly, regretfully; "you should be able to abide by it."

His humiliated pride forced him to a kind of bitter irony. He loved her much and she had hurt him deeply. We take a peculiar, fiendish pleasure in avenging ourselves upon those we love by taunting them with their mistake, for any

wrong, fancied or real, which they may have done us.

There was a moment's silence. Then Jack spoke:

"You did me a cruel wrong, Zida," he said at last, "but I am your slave. You know that too well and you showed your power once. But I dare say you have suffered as much in consequence as I. Zida," passionately, "I love you so well that I would risk the fires of torment for your sake. I would have come to you from the other side of the world had you bidden me, and you know it, and knowing this you decided upon a marriage with Nevarro. Well," he continues ironically, "he had money and I had not. That makes a great difference. Love was weighed in the balance and found wanting. I can never quite outlive that," he went on with bitterness. "I am here now in imminent danger of my life; for should your husband know this one of us would be murdered."

"Jack, you are cruel!" she shuddered. "Oh, horrors! What if you should be the one?"

"Well, you *do* care for me, after all," he said, heaving a quick sigh of relief, "and as you have never loved any other man, I feel the compliment."

He laughed mirthlessly. The laugh jarred on Zida.

"Do you doubt it, Jack?" she questioned quickly. "Have I not proven it to you?"

"I thank God that you do care for me," he said suddenly, sobering. "No, I do not doubt it now, Zida, though I once did. You have risked too

much for me, to admit of any doubt on that score; and I am glad I am the only man you ever loved, even tho' we both suffer for it. Few men can be insensible to such an honor. Now I have a proposition. It is this. You must get ready as quickly and quietly as possible and leave here with me to-night forever. We have but a short time; daylight must not find us here. It does not matter what the world may say," he urged, noting her momentary hesitation. "The world's good opinion will not compensate us for our wasted lives. Choose which you will. As for me I shall worship at the shrine of Love. It is my religion, and nothing else is worth living for. I would sacrifice wealth, position, friends—everything for love. I offer you your choice. If you stay here you will have wealth and a surfeit of friends as friends go; but you will suffer hell."

A shadow fell across the door for a moment, then disappeared.

"Please do not tempt me, Jack," she pleaded. "I cannot be so base. It is too late. I couldn't resist the temptation of speaking to you again, but you must not forget that my fate is to suffer —my doom is sealed."

The guests were taking their departure. Zida never knew until long after that her husband had come to the door in search of her, and comprehending all at a glance, had returned to the drawing-room and had answered inquiries concerning herself that she was no better, and would be unable to leave her room again that night.

"You do not care for me then," Jack said, rising and flinging her hand off his sleeve. Your

love is only a pretence. You merely sent for me to see if I was still under your power. You are still trying to flirt with me. I should think you would have enough of that by this," he went on with a peculiar laugh, half suppressed. "You will never have another opportunity, Zida. I cared enough for you to come for you; to risk my life that you might be out of your present unhappiness; and this is the way you are repaying me. Very well; 'tis better so I suppose. Tell me good-bye, Zida. I will never come again. In all probability we will never meet again; I hope so, at least. You need never write for me. I will never come again, to be made a fool of. Good-bye!"

"Stop, Jack," she begged, placing herself in his way; "don't go yet, please."

Could she see him pass out of her life forever? Could she settle back to that old life?—that dull despair? And had not Earle told her that he had no heart to give her?

She had allowed herself to imagine the bliss of this new life which opened before her, and that rendered the other doubly unendurable.

"Come back to-morrow morning, Jack," she said. "I shall be ready. It shall be as you wish."

A moment later the young man had flung himself out into the darkness. As he nervously opened the gate someone touched his arm. He turned on his heel; at the same time his hand instinctively went to his pocket.

"Jack," someone said in a broken undertone, "do not fear me. I am your friend."

"You, Nevarro?" the other exclaimed incredulously. "Where have you been?"

"I have seen and heard all, Jack," the man went on. "I have seen the dear, little girl's struggle between love and pride. I have seen your love for her; and I realize that I am the barrier that stands between you both and happiness. What am I to do? I cannot take my life. I might have done so two years ago, but someone has taught me that life does not end in death. I pity you both, Jack, and I do not blame you. Human nature is weak; or sometimes in cases like this it is strong as death. I know how it is myself. I have been there and I know what it means; but where you yielded to the temptation I did not. Perhaps you loved more. Jack, I wish I were dead and out of the way. I am surely the most miserable man upon God's earth to-night. I can only appeal to your generosity. Spare me this humiliation—this crowning sorrow. Remember the oath we took one year ago to-night. Remember the knight's pledge of honor and spare me."

"You need say no more, Nevarro," Jack said. "I have never known how to value a man of your stamp before. I hardly know what to think of you even now. If I ever met you again I expected to meet you as a deadly enemy. I don't know what to say to you. I was about to do you a great injury, but forgive me. The temptation was great. God helping me, I will never cause another human creature the pain I have caused you to-night. If I am not too contemptible I hope you will give me your hand in assurance of your forgiveness."

Nevarro clasped the outstretched hand.

"Yes, I forgive you, Jack, fully, freely. I for-

give you both. You remember God forgave a certain poor, erring woman much, because she loved much. For like reason do I forgive you. You must give her up, Jack, since she cannot you. I have known men and women whose general principles were above reproach—models of goodness, and yet when it came to the power of mutual attraction, they resisted but feebly."

They stood thus a moment in silence. It was a long good-bye as well as a mutual compact of future friendship. A straggling gleam of light from one of the windows fell across their faces as they stood there, and showed them as white as that of a corpse. Five minutes later a man flung himself face down upon the grass. God, pity him now! What earthly power can aid him?

It takes many and varied forms of suffering to change some men. But when an hour later Earle Nevarro made his way to his room he was totally different from the Earle of other days. As he passed down the hall the dim lights showed him the picture of despair—a prematurely old and broken man.

CHAPTER XX.

FOR ANOTHER'S WRONG.

"Take thy banner! May it wave
Proudly o'er the good and brave;
Take thy banner! and beneath
The battle clouds encircling wreath,
Guard it!—till our homes are free!
Guard it!—God will prosper thee!"

—*Longfellow.*

The summer had passed into winter, and winter into spring. The peaceful calm that had reigned over our beloved land for more than thirty years was broken by the roll of drums and the steady tramp of marching. Special trains and war boats carried our soldier boys away to fight a foreign foe. Old memories that had been allowed to sleep for more than a quarter of a century were brought forcibly back to those who witnessed and lived during our last bloody struggle, by the camps, the tented fields and the boys' uniforms. The time had come to say "Good-bye!"

Fond husbands kissed their wives good-bye, perhaps for the last time. Sweethearts did the same and made tender promises that were never to be forgotten. Earle Nevarro had enlisted. He

left with the hope of never returning. Serrell Levare volunteered also, and Jack Venarez, who was out west at the time, joined the fearless "Rough Riders" and went forth to the conflict. North, South, East and West came boldly to the front and offered their services. Nerved by a righteous hate they came forward as one body. It was a beautiful morning when Earle and Serrell joined their regiment and were carried away to the scene of the conflict. Nevarro had gone to Eloise on the night before.

"Good-bye, Eloise," he said, when the time had come to leave, "I may never see you again, little girl; but do not forget me. Knowing what I do, life to me is almost impossible. I have nothing now for which to live. Comfort my poor Zida as much as you can. I hope for her sake I may never come back."

"Do not say that," the girl said. "It would grieve Zida very much if anything were to happen to you. You are going to fight in a just cause, and 'while our soldier boys are fighting we can only pray'—you know. You are worthy of your position, Earle. You will do well. Let us hear from you occasionally."

It had been a great sorrow to Eloise when she had learned of the sad affair in which her brother and Zida were concerned. She was shocked and bitterly hurt. After the boys were gone she and Zida were much together. The months dragged slowly by and it was now summer. They heard from the soldiers often. Earle had written several letters. In one of them he said Serrell had been promoted to the rank of lieutenant. He said

they were lying in wait, preparing for a hot fight in a few days. Eloise had just been reading a newspaper account of a fierce battle fought a few days previous, and of the great demand for trained nurses. She threw the paper from her, and sat gazing thoughtfully into space.

They were in Zida's magnificently furnished sitting-room—she and Zida. Mrs. Van and Mrs. Nevarro were sitting out on the veranda.

"Zida," Eloise spoke suddenly, "why couldn't we study to be nurses and go to Cuba?"

"Nurses?" the other echoed incredulously. "I couldn't. The sight of blood always makes me ill. I couldn't dress a wound."

"Well, I could, I think," Eloise said. "Someone has to attend to it; and if the wounded can bear to suffer it, I think I can bear to see it. Our dear ones are there and are just as liable to be wounded as any other; and what a comfort it would be to them and to us if we could be near them. I really think I shall go."

After a fierce conflict on a distant battlefield, under a burning, tropical sun, a soldier wearing the uniform of an officer, sat beneath the shade of a palm and drew from his pocket a soiled letter, almost worn out with being folded so often, and scanned its contents. It was blistered and blotted with tears, and a peculiarly tender expression came into his eyes as he read. It closed with this sentence:

"Take the best possible care of yourself, Earle, and I pray how soon this cruel war may end, so you can come back to me. I miss you dreadfully. Your sorrowing Zida."

Throughout a hot, sultry day, during a very bloody and disastrous fight, the wounded were being brought in. The patient nurses moved among the sick and wounded like angels of mercy. Among them there is one face very familiar to us. In the true eyes and sweet smile we recognize Eloise. She stood beside the narrow bed whereon lay the young soldier who when we last saw him was reading that pathetic letter, and whose face showed what he had suffered. He was mortally wounded, and ever and anon a deep groan burst involuntarily from his white lips.

"Are you in much pain, Earle?" came the sweet voice at his side. "May I do anything else for you now?"

"Nothing but sit down beside me," he said.

She did as he requested, and slipping one arm under his shoulders, drew his head against hers, while with her disengaged hand she gently stroked the thick, blonde hair from his forehead. A cool, sea breeze had risen, and the moonlight was almost as bright as day.

"Tell her, Eloise," he said, "that I forgive her freely, and that she must forgive herself. Poor little girl! She is worrying unnecessarily, and I could not rest in my grave if I knew that she reproached herself. Everything is hers, to do with as she pleases. Mother will have enough to live comfortably the rest of her life; and Aunt Anna will live with Zida. Poor little woman! We both have suffered from that unfortunate marriage; she more than I. I am dying, dear. My good angel, I owe you much. All that I am I owe to you; for had it not been for you I would be

afraid to die now. Eloise, you will never know how much I love you; no one knows but God. I have often wondered why He did not grant me your love. But, dear one, I have much for which to be thankful, inasmuch as I have known the friendship of such a woman as you. Your influence has been a benediction on my life, and knowing this I am constrained to believe that I have not been forgotten."

He drew his ring from his finger—the one Eloise had worn—and slipped it on her hand.

"Wear it always, dear. No other woman has ever worn it. It has been my talisman. Let it be a reminder of a soul which had been turned from disbelief to Christianity through your influence. I hope that I may know you in another life, Eloise; and I believe I will. I shall wait for you, for Heaven would contain no happiness for me unless I recognized my loved ones. Perhaps up there all our sorrows here will be explained. Dear heart will you not kiss me good-bye? I have always wanted to kiss you, and now it can do no harm. It will not be showing any disloyalty to Zida. Remember, it is a dying man who asks you, and it is for the last time."

The tears were raining down Eloise's face. She bent her head and her lips met those of the man who had loved her so fondly, but alas! so hopelessly.

"I consider it a special dispensation of Providence that you are with me now," he said, with deep satisfaction, as her cheek rested for a moment against his. "I can ask for nothing more."

There was a moment's silence.

"When you come bring her, dear," the dying man said. "Do not come without her."

His breath was coming in short gasps; a damp dew was on his face.

"Tell them all good-bye for me, and, Eloise, if Jack comes out alive remember it is my last request that he and Zida marry and be happy."

He was still a moment—very still. The pale moon climbed slowly up the Heavens, and flooded the room with light. The memory of another death bed rose up before Eloise. His lips moved a moment. The girl bent lower.

"Earle?" she called softly. "Earle, do you hear me?"

He opened his eyes and they rested upon her face. A bright smile played across his lips.

"Yes, yes!" he answered feebly. "I would hear your voice—even amid the joys of Paradise!"

His face was illumined as the face of an angel. Seized with a sudden impulse of infinite pity the girl bent forward and kissed him. Thus that for which he would have bartered his soul during life was given him voluntarily as he stood upon the threshold of eternity. When she raised her head again she called him softly. There was no reply. Earle Nevarro was no more! As the realization burst upon her that he was indeed gone—that never again in life would her path cross his, a feeling of indescribable loneliness came over her heart, and with an exceeding bitter cry the girl buried her face in the pillow beside his, and wept unrestrainedly. A few moments passed thus. Then calmness came to her aid, and she raised her face and gazed upon the one

before her long and earnestly. He knew now something of the veiled mysteries of that mysterious hereafter. He and she had talked and wondered so often what came with the end of life as we know it here. It was not possible for the dead to return, the girl reasoned, as she stood sadly beside the corpse of the man who had loved her so devotedly, or at some time our loved ones would return to us, if only through infinite pity, to console and tell us what it is to enjoy Heaven and the smile of God. Or did they remember us at all? Or was there any consciousness after death? Yes, yes! Perish the thought! What had he seen at last to cause that angelic peace and hope which shone in his eyes as his life went out? What means that look of unspeakable rapture which we so often see upon the faces of our loved ones after death? Nothing in life can ever produce it. Oh, faithful heart that was true unto death! Let us hope that the unspeakable peace which you now enjoy compensates you a thousand fold for the self-sacrifice you endured, and the misery that was your portion here upon earth!

CHAPTER XXI.

AT LAST!

"Oh! fear not in a world like this,
And thou shalt know ere long,
Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong."

—*Longfellow*

October had come, and peace brooded like the wing of an angel over our fair land once more. In the Venarez residence everything was astir. Jack was at home. Since Eloise had returned she had been taking a quiet rest, and she needed it, for she was quite broken down. Zida came every day. She looked very sweet in her "widow's weeds," and a changed little woman it was. She and Jack had been together to-day for the first time since that night never to be forgotten; but they were very quiet. Zida had rendered herself very dear to Mrs. Nevarro by her constant attentions, and by her apparent deep grief for her husband, and the childless mother lavished all her pent up love for her dead children upon her son's wife. Jack was somewhat thinner than of yore, and still carried his left arm in a sling. Evidently he had known what warfare means. He was somewhat sobered, too. To

the day of his death, that rash act which he came so near committing would be a source of much regret. Twelve months had changed Jack materially. Zida had gone home, and Jack had strolled off down street. Twilight was falling.

Eloise, feeling sadder than usual, had gone to the piano, and after running her fingers over the keys a moment, began singing. Robed in soft white with snowy chrysanthemums in her dark hair and at her throat she made a pretty picture. Someone opened the door noiselessly and stood within the hall listening. He was reminded of a picture of St. Cecelia as he stood there. The next instant she stood face to face with Serrell Levare.

"Why, Serrell, when did you come?" she managed to say, while a faint beautiful color o'erspread her fair face. "This is a surprise."

"Yes?" he said with that rare smile which she prized so highly, still holding her hands. "I came just this evening. I would not apprise you of the fact. I wanted to surprise you. I rang, but you did not hear me, and as I heard you singing, I could not resist the temptation to come in unannounced."

"That was right," she said, "but how it startled me when I looked up and saw you standing there!"

He led her to a seat and sat down before her. There was a moment's awkward silence, then he spoke.

"I have come, dear, to tell you that I have not changed, and that in spite of everything I love you still. My darling," he went on passionately,

drawing her unresisting to him. "I offer you again the heart that you refused three years ago —the heart that has been yours through all, and yours only. Eloise, it is needless to tell you that I have loved but one woman. I have nothing to regret, as I succeeded in making my wife supremely happy, as you know. She never guessed our secret and I thank God for that. I thank Him that you taught me to be unselfish; to think of another's happiness before our own. Dear one—my guardian angel, I thank Heaven that we may be happy yet if you will it so. What is your answer, Eloise?"

"I have not changed, Serrell."

"I might have known that," he said, folding her to his heart. "Such women as you *never* change. Let there be no delay then; there is no need. Let us not postpone our happiness any longer. I will give you just two weeks to enjoy the freedom of your spinsterhood," smiling—"not a day more. So you needn't protest. We've had to wait for our happiness too long. Let it be a quiet affair. It will be different from the other," he continued with a touch of sadness. "I am going to purchase Gray Turrets of Mrs. Nevarro for our future home. We will spend our honeymoon there, dear, and it will end only with life. You shall live by the sea as you said you would long ago, and I will be with you, and not as a friend, thank Heaven; but as something a great deal nearer and dearer and infinitely better."

There was a moment's blissful silence, in which a bell in a distant belfry tolled mournfully. It

recalled to Levare another night when he had heard it.

"Shall it be as I wish, dear?"

"Yes, Serrell."

He raised her hand to his lips and then holds it off from him, regarding the exquisite diamond ring in answer to her questioning look.

"No," he said, "I am not jealous of poor Nevarro's ring, and I want you to wear it because he wished it. He had everything else necessary to make him a happy man but your love, and you know the saying, 'If I have not love, I have nothing.' Poor Nevarro! He loved you very deeply, but, my little woman, I am thankful that the priceless treasure of your love is mine alone."

Two weeks later the *Morning Times* contained the following description of the wedding:

"Yesterday we attended the marriage of our accomplished young writer, Miss Eloise Venarez, to our able attorney and fellow-citizen, Hon. Serrell Levare. The marriage took place at the bride's beautiful home, and was one of the prettiest weddings we have witnessed for many a day. It was quite an informal affair; only the immediate relatives and a few friends being present. The happy pair left for Gray Turrets, their future home, on the evening train. Hon. and Mrs. Levare will be greatly missed from our midst, and carry with them the best wishes of a host of friends."

After the ceremony Serrell had introduced the minister to his wife. He came forward and congratulated her, saying as he did so:

"Do you not remember me, Mrs. Levare?"

Eloise regarded him a moment silently.

"No, I'm afraid I do not," she said, smiling a little, "and yet it seems that I have seen you somewhere."

"Do you not remember a small boy who one evening long ago assisted you home with a little child?"

The color rushed to the girl's face. This man, then, with his clerical air and polished manners, had been the bootblack of Johnson's Alley!

"Yes, indeed, I *do* remember you," she said, warmly. "I trust God may bless you in your noble profession!"

"I little thought when your husband asked me to officiate to-day that you were to be the bride. I recognized you the moment you came into the room. I never forget a face."

He stood holding her hand a moment.

"And the little boy? I suppose he is still with you?"

Eloise did not reply immediately and when she did her voice trembled.

"The little boy went to dwell with the angels the day after we met you."

They were silent a moment. Then Serrell spoke:

"You would have seen more of Rev. Mr. Howard, my dear, but since his ordination he has been at Tampa. When we were stationed there, before going to Cuba, he was conducting a revival which most of the boys attended. He has only just returned."

"Yes, indeed," the young pastor said with a thoughtful air. "We will never know until the

day of judgment the incalculable amount of good that was accomplished there."

* * * * * * * * * *

"It's all for the best, I suppose," Mrs. Nevarro was saying in a resigned way on the evening of Serrell's marriage, as she and Mrs. Van Worth sat together in the Nevarro drawing-room, "but she'll never make Serrell the wife that my poor Lillian did—never!"

They had been married half a year. Zida and Jack were visiting them. Zida had discarded her deep mourning. She was robed in pure white. Serrell had been working very hard for the past two months. He was taking a vacation now, and he and Eloise were walking up the long cypress-bordered avenue that led to their home.

"It was here that I thought you were lost to me forever," he said, pressing her arm to his side. I spent the most wretched moments of my life here, dear; and it is here that I will spend the remainder of my life. We never thought then that we would be so happy, did we?"

That morning when Serrell and Jack had gone into the smoking room, Serrell slapped him on the shoulder, saying:

"Marriageable orphans are scarce, Jack, but you and Zida will have a double dose of mothers-in-law. Three women to one man is rather more than a match."

"Not a bit of it!" the other said, coolly, removing his cigar from his lips a moment. "You see that is a prearranged affair. Mrs. Van and Nevarro will live at the Nevarro home. Zida and I

are going to take a home further out of town. She will sell her house."

Jack's feet were propped upon the fireplace, and he leisurely smoked a cigar.

"When is the thing to take place?" Serrell asked after a moment's silence.

The other did not answer at once.

"I don't know, Levare," he said at last, removing his cigar from his lips and staring moodily before him. "Zida and I can't make up our minds that it is right. She seems to think it almost a sin. It seems that poor Nevarro has been dead such a short while, and to think that he should so soon be forgotten!"

"I cannot see the sin in it," Serrell replied, blowing a volume of smoke to the ceiling. "Earle has been dead almost a year, and that you two should marry was his dying wish, you know."

The other was silent a moment.

"His was one of the grandest natures I ever knew," he said suddenly. "He was utterly beyond my comprehension. Women are strange creatures, Levare. She could not be happy with him, and now she loves me. After having known a man like that she can love a man of my stamp. I cannot understand it. The longer I live the more clearly am I convinced that all great men do not have biographies; neither are they known to fame, but when we come to know them thoroughly, we find them among all classes and in every walk of life. We will not be married before spring out of respect to poor Nevarro's memory."

* * * * * * * * * *

Twilight is falling. Eloise and Serrell are sitting beside an open window, through which drifts in a balmy breeze. The evening stillness is broken by Zida's happy laugh from the veranda, where she and Jack are enjoying themselves in a hammock. The sea zephyrs have risen, and the majestic dark cypresses in the yard, clothed in their feathery foliage, sway their gigantic arms to and fro with a gentle whispering, delicious and soothing. From the far-off fields comes the faint tinkle of cow bells, and the distant bleating of a solitary sheep; a bat wheels low in pursuit of prey, while the monotonous lapping of the waves beats on the stillness.. In one of the cabins near there is an unusual commotion. Old Uncle Tom is holding prayer meeting at his house to-night, and a crowd of "darkies" have congregated about the door. Suddenly a weirdly-sad sound breaks the stillness. Services have begun, and they are singing a song. It is sung in that wailing, crooning cadence peculiar to the negroes of the South:

"W'en yer go down ter Jordon member me,
Lord,
Dere's a little wheel er turnin' in mer heart——"

Other voices take it up, and it increases in volume. In spite of the ludicrousness of the words there is something inexpressibly pathetic in it all.

"I cannot but think of Ada," Eloise said, slipping her arm around her husband's neck. "I had a letter from her this morning, in which she says she is happily married. Her husband, she says,

is as kind to her as if she were a little child. She deems divorce one of the greatest concessions ever granted an erring and unhappy generation. There is nothing that so effectually kills energy, and smothers ambition as an incongenial and unhappy marriage. What would her life have been had she remained the wife of Ballette? Living with so coarse a creature she would have, eventually, lost all of her refinement and self-respect, as his will was so much stronger than hers, and I fully believe in the words:

"'Thou art mated to a clown,
And the grossness of his nature hath the power
to drag thee down——'"

all arguments to the contrary notwithstanding. Happily married, the possibilities of her young life are boundless. She was far too young when she married Ballette to use the discretion which is an essential factor in all happy marriages. Persons who cannot agree will separate anyway; and is not a lawful divorce preferable to a simple leave taking? Should an innocent and inoffensive man or woman be compelled to live a lifetime of unhappiness because of an error of youth? Most assuredly not. We are only human, and when that is admitted everything is admitted, and a human law has provided a merciful escape for the unfortunate man or woman who finds, instead of the expected Eden, in this divine institution, a perfect Hades."

She was silent a moment, and then:

"She is happy at last, despite Earle's predic-

tion to the contrary. He feared that she would gradually drift downward, but, thank God, she has not. Poor Earle! He was sincere in his aversion to the divorce law, as the subsequent events of his life gave proof. He would have had Zida remain with him as his wife, even tho' life were torture. I am forced to believe that the pride which prompts such an action is a curse rather than an honor."

Again that happy laugh reaches them from the veranda. It is in unison this time.

"I am so glad that they are going to be happy at last," she said, nestling her head against his shoulder.

Serrell's arms tightened around her.

"As we are, my precious wife," he says, and there is an expression of great thankfulness in his dark, quiet eyes. "When a man possesses the undivided love of a pure wife, he is blest indeed. Heaven has been kind to us, my Eloise, in granting us at last the blessed realization of all our hopes; and I am a devout believer in the justice and wisdom of the decrees of God, and can never thank Him, tho' my life shall be spent in that endeavor, for the wondrous love He has shown me in granting me the love of a dear wife in whose affection I am supremely blest. A good, pure woman is God's masterpiece."

THE END.

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